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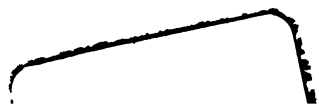

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THE

MARTYRDOM OF MADELINE

BY

ROBERT BUCHANAN

AUTHOR OF 'GOD AND THE MAN' 'THE SHADOW OF THE SWORD' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

BIBLIOTHECA
AUG 1882
BODLEIANA

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1882

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251. i. 917.

LONDON : PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
AND PARLIAMENT STREET

PREFATORY NOTE.

In this story I have touched, very feebly and inadequately, on one of the greatest and saddest of human problems—as great and sad, certainly, as the problem which forms the central purpose of my 'Shadow of the Sword.' What the creed of Peace is to the state, the creed of Purity is to the social community. So long as carnal indulgence is recognised as a masculine prerogative, so long as personal chastity is a supreme factor in the fate of women, but a mere accident in the lives of men, so long as the diabolic ingenuity of a strong sex is tortured to devise legal means for sacrificing a weaker sex—so long, in a word, as our homes and our streets remain what they are—the creed of Purity must remain as forlorn a dream as that other creed of Peace.

One word more with regard to my *dramatis personæ*, none of whom are to be taken for photographs or caricatures of living individuals. In one case I have endeavoured to construct out of the editorial chit-chat of a journal an amusing personality,—not, I think, ungenerously conceived; of the real editor I know absolutely nothing, and I certainly bear him no ill-will, much as I dislike the system of personal journalism which he has created. All the other characters are purely fictitious. Gavrolles and his circle are to be accepted as representatives, not of æstheticism proper, but of the cant of æstheticism — which is quite another thing.

R. B.

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THE

MARTYRDOM OF MADELINE.

PROLOGUE IN THE NIGHT.

As the two women gazed at one another under the lamp-light, one standing and looking down, the other sitting and looking up, you would have said they might have been twin sisters—they looked so wonderfully alike. Both were fair, with pale forget-me-not eyes, and skins delicately clear; both were tall and slight. Nor was there any very noticeable difference in the dress they wore. She who stood erect, with the rain beating down upon her head, wore only, besides her bonnet and dress of black stuff, a shawl

wrapt tightly around her; the shawl was rich and valuable, but looked common enough in the dim light. She who sat, with her elbow on her knees and her chin resting in her open palms, wore a shawl too, and a plain stuff dress, sodden with the rain; her bonnet had fallen back, soaking and unheeded, on her shoulders, just held by the sodden strings.

A close observer, however, would have perceived a world of difference between these two women. The woman standing had the fierce, pained, impatient manner of a wild animal; every look, every gesture was self-contained, determined, yet full of overmastering anxiety. The woman sitting was a crushed, gin-sodden, passionless, powerless waif, with only the courage of a hunted pariah dog, to snap, and crawl uselessly away.

Both were very young neither being more than twenty-one or twenty-two years of age.

'That way!—over the Bridge!' said the woman sitting, in a husky voice; then she added, as the other seemed about to pass on, 'Stop though! what are you going to stand?'

The other turned quickly, and again looked down with her large eager eyes.

'What do you want?—Money?' The voice was deep and clear, though it trembled a little.

'Yes, I'm as thirsty as a fish. Lend me a shilling, and I'll pay you back some night when I'm in luck. Only a shilling! that won't break you!'

'If I give you money, what will you do with it?'

'Drink it,' was the curt reply.

Something in the answer had a curious effect on the hearer. She stooped softly down and looked earnestly in the other woman's face.

'You'll know me again when you see me?'

'Do you mind telling me your name?'

'Ellen,—never mind what else. Nell for short.'

'Where do you live?'

'Anywhere.'

'How old are you?'

'Lord knows. Twenty or thereabouts. Are you going to keep on questioning all the blessed night? I want something to drink.'

The girl who stood bent over the sitting girl and placed something in her hand. She uttered a suppressed cry.

'Gold! Why, you've given me a sovereign! What for?'

'I have only another, or I would give you more. I am sorry for you. Good night!'

'Stop! don't go. Let me have another look at you.'

'Well?'

'What a fool I was! Why you're *a lady!*'

It was the other's turn to laugh now—a low, bitter laugh.

'And you've got on a real Injy shawl—let me feel it! And there's a pair of gold bracelets on your wrists! Well, I'm——!!'

This with a prolonged half whistle, expressive of utter surprise. Then she continued—

'I don't know who you are, or where you're a-going, but the streets ain't safe for the likes of *you*. You'd best go home, my lady!'

'I have no home.'

'What!'

'What home I had I have left, never to go back. I am leaving London.'

'Where are you going?'

'Anywhere.' After a moment's pause she pointed across the river and over the house-tops, and added 'Out there.'

'Friends there, I suppose?'

'No friends.'

'And not much coin. Ah, well, you've

them swell-bracelets; and the shawl, too, is worth money.'

It was very strange—innocent as the remark seemed, it appeared to make the tall figure of the listener tremble with agitation, perhaps with anger. With a quick impetuous movement she drew off her bracelets and threw them into the girl's lap.

'Take them—*I* don't want them! And the shawl too—take it, and give me yours.'

'No, you're joking!'

'Quick!'

In a moment the change was effected; and the women now stood erect and face to face. The commoner and more outcast creature seemed utterly stupefied by what had taken place. Suddenly the other seized both her hands, and said quickly—

'The river—is it there?'

A light seemed suddenly to flash in upon the outcast's bewildered brain.

'You're not a-going to drown yourself? No!'

'I don't know—perhaps!'

This with a peculiar smile.

'It's no use; there's too many eyes a-watching. I tried it myself once, slap off the Embankment, but I was fished out like a wet rag. Don't you be such a fool! You're a lady, and you had best go home.'

Without replying, the lady began to move rapidly away. Seized by a peculiar impulse, the outcast cried after her—

'Come back—take your things—it's a shame for me to have them. Take them back.'

'No; keep them. Good-bye. May I kiss you?'

'If you like,' was the stupefied reply.

The lips of the two women met, their breaths mingled for a moment. Then, while the one stood petrified, staring in utter astonishment, the other flitted rapidly and silently away.

CHAPTER I.

A DANCING LESSON UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

TWELVE years before the occurrence of the incident described in my prologue, a curious group was assembled in a quiet corner of Grayfleet Churchyard. Grayfleet is a damp, aguish, lonely, desolate village, on the verge of the great Essex marshes; and its old church, like a skull with two empty, lifeless eyes, gazes with two dreary windows right down on the marshes, towards that low-lying mist where they mingle with the sea.

The group of which I have spoken consisted of some six girls and one little boy. The girls were of divers ages, from six to sixteen, and all were more or less smartly dressed in holiday clothes, for it

was a Good Friday. They stood in a ring round a flat tombstone, grey with age, and green with slime of moss. On this tombstone a fair little girl of eight, with dishevelled hair and flushed cheeks, was practising the first steps of a dance. Her instructress was the eldest of the party, a pale, red-haired wench of sixteen, who watched her with keenly critical eyes, and at times stepped forward, took her place on the tombstone, and showed her how to use her feet.

First position—heel and toe—cut and shuffle.

'Lookee here, Mawther!' cried one of the girls to a passer-by. 'Come and see Polly Lowther teaching Mark Peartree's girl to dance.'

Another girl came running into the churchyard, and joined the group.

'That's the style!' exclaimed Polly Lowther, as the red-haired girl was called. 'You'll soon learn, if you only

try. Look at me, Madlin. Watch my feet.'

First position—heel and toe—cut and shuffle.

The girls clapped their hands enthusiastically, and the little boy, who was sitting astride on a green grave, grinned approval.

Fired by the applause bestowed on her teacher, the little fair girl—'Madlin,' as the others called her—began wildly practising the steps.

First position—heel and toe—cut and shuffle.

Suddenly there was a rush, a cry. The troop of girls scattered on every side and disappeared: the little boy cried and ran. Only 'Madlin' remained, so absorbed for the time being in her dancing that for a moment she did not notice that she was left alone, and that a tall figure in black, with white neckcloth, stood frowning at her.

The next moment she was conscious of her predicament. Flushed and panting, she stood and gazed, and recognised to her horror the Rector of the parish.

She gave one glance around, to see if she was quite abandoned, and then, seeing no trace of her companions, she curtsied timidly, and stood her ground.

'Little girl,' said the Rector, in a terrible voice, 'I don't know you—what is your name?'

She hung her head awkwardly, and made no reply.

'Do you hear me? What is your name?'

The little girl raised her head, looked straight at the Rector, and answered in a clear voice—

'If you please, sir, I'm Madlin—Mark Peartree's girl.'

The Rector's brows came down still more.

'Mark Peartree; I think I know the

man—he lives down at the ferry, and sails in a barge. Is he your father?'

The girl, who had a common straw hat swinging by the ribbon in her mouth, gnawed the ribbon, and replied shortly—

'No, he ain't.'

'What is he, then?' asked the Rector. 'Some relation?'

'No,' was the immediate reply. 'I call him uncle, but he isn't a *real* uncle, nor Uncle Luke neither. I'm a foundling —Aunt Jane found me, out *there!*'

And with a back sweep of her hand, the little girl indicated the great marshes, steaming and reddening in the setting sun.

'And whoever you are, are you not aware,' said the Rector, improving the occasion, 'that you are a very wicked little girl? Upon this holy day of all days in the year I find you practising a vicious pastime here, in God's own acre! On a

tombstone! Little girl, do you know that there is a dead fellow-creature lying under you, and that you are profaning his place of rest?'

The girl gave a start and a scared look downward, as if half expecting the dead man to arise and confront her; then half unconsciously she edged off the tombstone and stood ankle deep in the long churchyard grass.

'I am afraid,' said the Rector, shaking his forefinger at her, 'I am really very much afraid that you have been very badly brought up. Tell me, have you ever heard the word of God? Do you ever go to church?'

The answer was at any rate prompt and explicit.

'No—never.'

'Ah, I thought so. A sad case. And your father—I mean your adopted father—is he not ashamed of himself to bring you up in ignorance and sin?'

This was touching rather a dangerous chord. The little girl flushed, panted, opened her large blue eyes full on the minister and exclaimed—

'Uncle Mark isn't ashamed of himself, no more is Uncle Luke! They go to their meeting, and I go too. They're United Brethren, and when I grow up, *I'm* to be a Brethren too!'

'Brethren!'

This was said in a tone which clearly implied that their cup of moral delinquency, in the Rector's eyes, was now full and overflowing. The good pastor could have endured a family which repudiated Christianity altogether, but any form of Dissent was worse even than the rankest blasphemy. It is doubtful what turn the interview would have taken, but just at this moment an unexpected diversion took place. A thin shrill voice, doubtless appertaining to one of the little girl's late companions, suddenly pealed out, from

some mysterious corner where its owner lay hidden—

'Look out, Madlin! Here's your Uncle Luke a-comin'!'

Madeline looked startled; then, strange to say, her face grew quite bright and eager. The Rector seemed perplexed, and uncertain what to say next. Just then the gate of the churchyard opened, and a little man, with very short legs and a very large head, looked in, and seeing Madeline, quietly entered.

'Uncle! Uncle Luke!'

The little man nodded his head and smiled. Then, seeing the Rector, he took off his hat and grinned.

It was a peculiarity of the little man that he expressed all thoughts and moods by means of a rather mindless smile, sometimes broadening into a grin. For the rest, he had large watery eyes and a large mouth, and his general appearance was homely and awkward in the extreme.

By this time Madeline was at his side, holding his hand and looking up into his face.

The Rector strode across the churchyard.

'I have just been warning this child against dancing upon the tombstones. I have told her that she is a very wicked child, and she has informed me that her relations belong to some Methodist persuasion. Be that as it may, you will doubtless agree with me that her conduct to-day has been extremely sacrilegious.'

The little man, still holding his hat in his hand, looked at the Rector, then looked at Madeline, then smiled imbecilely, then, feeling the smile out of place, tried to frown, but only succeeded in distorting his good-humoured countenance into a confirmed grin. Then suddenly darting his mouth down to the little girl's ear, he hoarsely whispered—

'What is it, Madlin? What's the matter?'

'Polly Lowther was teaching me to cut and shuffle,' said the girl out loud, fixing her eyes in a fearless way on the Rector; 'and Parson came out and found us, and all the others ran away. I know dancing's wicked, because Uncle Mark says so, but I couldn't help it, and Parson says Uncle Mark ought to be ashamed of himself, and I told Parson it isn't *true!*'

This explanation seemed to confuse the little man still more. He scratched his head and peeped at the Rector with a grin.

'Dancing's downright wicked,' he said, 'no doubt o' that.'

'It is no laughing matter,' cried the Rector, indignantly, irritated at the unaccountable expression on the little man's face. 'Be good enough to leave the precincts of the church. The child is a bad child, and has been badly trained. There, there, hold your tongue—I desire no further explanations; only remember this,

if that child desecrates the churchyard again, I shall resort to severer measures.'

So saying he waved the pair from the churchyard, shut the gate sharply upon them, and stalked away to the Rectory, with a bosom full of holy emotion and Christian wrath.

The little man stood for some minutes in the open road, dazed, gaping, and looking at the tall retreating figure. Then he quietly put on his hat, and, conscious of the little hand within his own, looked down at his companion, at a loss what to say or do. At last he cut the Gordian knot of his perplexity by grinning from ear to ear.

'Parson be in a powerful rage,' he said; 'but dancing be downright wicked, that's a fact;' and he added, with a perplexed look, as if communing with his own thoughts, 'What shall I say to your Uncle Mark?'

Madeline seemed to muse for some

moments, then, as if struck by a sudden inspiration, she exclaimed—

'Come along, Uncle Luke—let's go home.'

The little man laughed contentedly, as if finding in the proposition a solution of all his difficulty; and the little legs began to move. Hand in hand, the two hurried down the descent leading from the church to the outskirts of the village. As they went along, Madeline peeped up quietly from time to time at her companion, as if trying to read his thoughts; then, squeezing his hand tight, she said in a coaxing voice—

'Uncle Luke!'

'Yes, Madlin.'

'You won't tell Uncle Mark about my dancing.'

'I don't know—dancing be downright wicked.'

'I couldn't help it. Polly Lowther offered to teach me, and all the other girls

can dance a bit. And if you won't say a word to Uncle Mark, I'll let you cut up my new money-box that Uncle Mark gave me, and find out what's inside.'

Unaccountable as it may seem, this extraordinary proposition seemed to find peculiar favour in Uncle Luke's eyes. His large eyes twinkled, and his mouth broadened from ear to ear, but he pretended to shake his head from side to side in solemn deprecation of the bribe. Madeline watched him keenly, and just as he seemed wavering, she lifted his great brown hand to her mouth, and gave it a passionate kiss. This seemed to unsettle Uncle Luke altogether, and he murmured eagerly—

'All right, Madlin, *I* shan't tell.'

And Madeline knew well that a promise of this sort from Uncle Luke was as good as an oath from any other man. They quickened their pace, but she continued to play with and fondle his hand,

and now and then to hold it to her lips. Confidence of this sort was what the little man loved best of all things in the world, and the smile upon his face grew broad and bright with intelligent content.

CHAPTER II.

'UNCLE' LUKE AND 'UNCLE' MARK.

WHILE the setting sun gleamed on Grayfleet, its grim church, and its cluster of red-tiled dwellings, Uncle Luke took a footpath leading across the marshes. All around them the landscape was flat and level, with little or no vegetation; for over the dark low levels the sea had crawled, and would crawl again. Here and there hovered a seagull, tempted in from the distant salt water, and searching the marsh for plunder; and once, as they passed a shallow pool, blood-red in the light, a heron rose with a harsh cry and flapped slowly away.

A walk of half a mile across the marsh brought them to the river side, and within

view of a sort of pendant to the upper village, in the shape of a row of tiny red-tiled cottages on the very bank. Here there was a ferry-house, with a licence 'to sell ale and tobacco.'

As they turned into the river path, the ferry-boat was crossing leisurely, with a freight of country girls on their way home from Grayfleet.

Uncle Luke trotted cheerfully along, still holding Madeline by the hand. Her eyes were now on the shining river and the drifting ferry-boat, and she had almost forgotten her scene with the Rector.

They were a curious pair. The girl was a slender slight thing, wild as some wayside weed. Her form was curiously light and graceful; her face, with its large passionate eyes, very wistful and sad. The common cotton frock and coarse country shoes and stockings became her well, though her limbs were somewhat long and shapeless as yet. And if the

girl was not a little fairylike, Uncle Luke would certainly have passed well for a Gnome, or say rather, one of those quaint Trolls whose task it was, according to Scandinavian legend, to work busily in the bowels of the earth.

All the week long Uncle Luke *did* work, on the black river barge of which he was mate and his brother captain. From Monday to Saturday his figure was clad in blue jersey, red cap, and rough tarpaulin trousers, and he helped to work the barge on its short journeys up and down the crowded river. But on the present occasion, it being a holiday, his attire was radiant—a high chimney-pot hat, very broad at the brim, and large enough to descend to his ears, a blue pilot coat, a white waistcoat, and a coloured cotton shirt, blue navy trousers, and lace-up boots. For Uncle Luke loved splendour, and nothing suited him better than to shine glorious in the eyes of his neighbours;

though Uncle Mark, who was his elder brother, and strictly pious, disapproved of all these vanities of apparel.

It may be admitted, without further preamble, that Uncle Luke, though able-bodied, was mentally deficient; indeed, in the estimation of many sober and wiser people, a simple fool, or, in the local parlance, little better than a natural. Yet his shortcomings were by no means upon the surface, and it would have taken a very wise man to understand them at a glance. He was harmless, industrious, and in some respects particularly shrewd. He knew how many pence make a shilling, and how many shillings a pound, as well as most men, and he had a sharp intuitive perception of human character. With all this he was simple beyond measure, and his reasoning faculties were absolutely infinitesimal.

Great as was his good nature, he strongly resented any imputation on his

sagacity. His brother Mark had secured him work at a very low wage, on the understanding that he was weak and easily tired; and there on the barge, under his brother's eye, he laboured cheerfully, save when some one was cruel enough to take advantage of his weakness or to deride his infirmity. At such times, he was subject to wild fits of passion. When these were over, he would creep into the cabin, cry like a child, and perhaps take to his hammock for days.

But to-day he looked happy enough, partly on account of his lucky escape from the Rector, and partly because Madeline had promised him the unparalleled treat of cutting open her bright new money-box.

This was a kind of temptation he never could resist. Had he possessed a watch, he would have taken it to pieces to examine the works; and he had been languishing with curiosity for days, puzzling his head, as many a child has done, to

know what was inside the money-box labelled 'Savings' Bank,' with its front painted like a town hall, and a slit in its top for the reception of vagrant pence.

Having come in sight of the ferry, the two walked on quickly. The sun blazed down on them with golden splendour, and from beneath their feet the dust arose in a cloud. Neither spoke; Madeline continued to impress an occasional kiss on the hand which she still held fondly in hers—and to each of these exhibitions of feeling her companion replied by a broad grin. Suddenly, however, he gave a start and, looking down at his flushed and dusty companion, said quickly—

'I say, Madlin, you'd best put on your Sunday hat. There be Uncle Mark at the garden gate!'

Without a word, Madeline obeyed. She took the hat, which for coolness and comfort she had swung on her arm, and tied it carefully on her head. Then regaining

possession of her uncle's hand, she walked decorously up to one of the little green cottage gates, on the other side of which stood, indeed, her Uncle Mark.

Though Luke and Mark were brothers, they were as unlike one another as two men could possibly be. Mark Peartree stood six feet in his shoes; he was very thin, and he stooped slightly at the shoulders. His hair was grey, his face red as a Ripston pippin, but his cheeks were sunken, perhaps from the loss of many teeth.

The cottage was one of a row of red brick, with creepers crawling over the front, a small plot of garden facing the river, enclosed by green wooden railings and a green wooden gate. Upon one of the gates now leaned Uncle Mark, clad, too, in his Sunday best, but much less gaudily than Luke, and looking down the road with impatience marked on every lineament of his face.

'Here you be at last,' he said, when the vagrant pair came up. 'Why, mate alive, can't you be home at meal times? Mother's in a powerful rage. Brother Brown be coming this afternoon, and he'll be here afore we can get our wittles done!'

At this speech the smile faded from Luke's face; but, before he could utter a word in reply, another voice, evidently that of a female, chimed in from the cottage—

'I'm sure, father, it be like you to be asking Brother Brown and the Brethren here of a Good Friday, as if we didn't get enough of them every day i' the year. However, coming they be, but we shan't get the dinner over any the quicker with you standing racketing there!'

The speaker stood in the doorway, the red brick and the green creepers framing her as she stood. A comfortable looking woman, dressed in a clean cotton gown, with a coarse white apron tied round her waist. She was short and stout, with a

brown good-humoured face and glossy black hair. She wore a cap the long ends of which were thrown over her shoulders and pinned behind, as if for freedom; her sleeves were rolled up nearly to the elbow, and her hands and arms were mottled brown and red with constant work in soap and water.

At sight of this figure, no other indeed than Mrs. Mark Peartree, or, as Madeline called her, 'Aunt Jane,' the good-humoured grin again took possession of Uncle Luke's face. Passing through the little gate he made for the door and at once entered the house, while Madeline transferred her attentions to Uncle Mark.

'It wasn't any fault o' Uncle Luke's,' she said, looking up into the grim weather-beaten face, 'indeed, Uncle Mark, 'twas all on account o' *me* that he was so long—I was up there with Polly Lowther, looking at the graves.'

In her eagerness to excuse her fa-

vourite, Madeline might have revealed the dreaded secret of the dance, but Uncle Mark, who had his own reasons for wishing to get the dinner quickly disposed of, patted her hand and said—

'All right, Madlin, my lass;' and, taking her small hot hand in his big horny fist, led her into the house.

It was a very small house. A long narrow passage led from the front door to the back, and midway in the passage was a flight of narrow carpetless stairs. On the right opened out two rooms—a kitchen, and a parlour, as it was called. During the week, while the men were at work on the river, the parlour was carefully closed up. No fire was ever lit in it—it was dark, well polished, and genteel, with a bit of drugget for a carpet, a china shepherd and shepherdess, and several shells on the mantelpiece, and on the walls two highly illuminated pictures, one representing the Prodigal Son, the other

Susannah and the Elders. But in the centre of the mantelpiece stood the crowning glory of the apartment—a small 'weather-cottage' made of wood, formed in the shape of a roofed shed, and containing two figures, one of 'Darby' and another of 'Joan,' standing on either side of a piece of wood, suspended in the centre by a quicksilver pole. When the weather was fine, Joan swung out, with her basket on her arm, as if going to market, and left Darby under cover; when it was wet, Joan retreated, and Darby emerged to brave the elements like a man. This weather-cottage was a miracle of art in Madeline's eyes, and was regarded with no little reverence by all the members of the house. Indeed, the parlour altogether was a sanctuary, full of a pious clamminess and darkness, and even Mrs. Peartree never entered it without a certain awe, tempered with a sense of increased respectability. From week's end to

week's end they remained in the red-tiled kitchen, while on Sunday evening, and indeed on every festive occasion like the present, the parlour was thrown open for the family use.

CHAPTER III.

EASTER SOLEMNITIES OF THE BRETHREN.

It was in the paven kitchen, however, that the party now assembled, and taking their seats round the square deal table, which was spread with a clean table-cloth, began at once upon their dinner—a boiled leg of pork and potatoes.

With her little feet swinging to and fro, and her large blue wistful eyes roving wistfully about the room, Madeline sat and ate up her portion contentedly. The sun streaming through the back window caressed her bright cheek and dusty hair, and made her think of the glad light which had touched her only a short time ago, while she had been learning to

dance upon the tombs. Suddenly a strange thought seemed to strike her.

'Uncle Mark,' she said, while Uncle Luke dropped his knife and fork in wonder, 'can dead folk *feel*?'

'No, my lass,' returned Uncle Mark, with some little surprise in his mild blue eyes. 'Dead men is dead as nails is—they can't feel nothing. What put that into your head?'

But Madeline did not answer; a sense of great satisfaction had stolen over her at this brief assurance, and, with a glance of meaning at Uncle Luke, she said to herself that, for once in his life, the parson had been wrong.

Dinner being over, there was a general movement, and a great awe came over the family as the door of communication between the kitchen and parlour was thrown open, and the latter was seen in all its sepulchral splendour. Uncles Mark and Luke passed reverently in, and closed the

door; but soon Madeline was made straight and clean, and sent in after them, while Aunt Jane, who seemed seized with unaccountable irritability, remained to tidy up the kitchen.

Once in the parlour, Madeline crept up to the window, and gazed with wistful dreamy eyes across the little garden on the great still river, which crept past flashing and darkening in the sun. Uncle Mark, seated on a very shiny and sticky horsehair sofa, was deep in the pages of the family Bible, while Uncle Luke, with a face as grave as a judge, was repeating in an undertone the words of an Easter hymn. All was quiet and still in the sepulchral chamber; but through the closed door they could distinctly hear the rattling of dishes, the clangour of pots and pans, from the kitchen. Presently this rattling and clangour became positively furious, and simultaneously a loud rat-a-tat was heard at the front door. Finally, to the

same noisy accompaniment, the room door was opened, and a number of visitors came in one by one.

They consisted of a tall thin man, dressed in glossy black, with a long thin face, broad protruding forehead, and a bald head; followed by several very rough-looking figures in high hats and rude Sunday suits. Each as he entered doffed his hat, with a nod of solemn greeting to Uncles Mark and Luke. The tall man paused in the centre of the room and breathed heavily, while Uncle Mark rose to receive him. He was evidently expected.

The tall man in black, a retired tradesman, known in the neighbourhood as 'Brother Brown,' was the leader of the sect known as the 'United Brethren,' of which Uncles Mark and Luke were lowly members. He was a person of some importance and some property, but, having no wider field in which to practise his feats of piety, he was content every Sunday to

visit the row of cottages, and, gathering his satellites together in one house or another, discourse to them on the lights and shadows of another world.

After the keen glance into the room, Brother Brown gave his whole hand to Uncle Mark, and the tips of his fingers to Uncle Luke, nodded grimly to Madeline, and sinking on the sofa, covered his face with large red hands, and sank into deep silence. This manœuvre was followed by all the others present except Madeline. Each covered his face with his hand, and took a gentle header, so to speak, into himself. If we may continue the metaphor, all remained under water for many minutes. The effect was awe-inspiring.

At last Brother Brown uncovered his face and came up refreshed; the other men emerged one by one.

'Brother Peartree,' he said, addressing Uncle Mark, 'are we all here?'

'Yes, sir,' answered Uncle Mark,

while his blue eyes wandered over the group. 'Here be Brother Strangeways, Brother Smith, Brother Hornblower, Brother Billy Hornblower, Brother Luke Peartree, and myself. Not to speak of little Madlin—she axed to come in, and a child can't begin too early.'

Brother Brown coughed heavily and looked at the kitchen door, through which came at intervals a dull clangour as of pots and pans.

'Then I suppose,' he said, 'Sister Peartree is still obdurate. Will she not join our little gathering, and listen for once to the words of healing?'

Uncle Mark looked very red and uncomfortable, and jerked his thumb awkwardly towards the door.

'Never mind the missus to-day, Brother Brown—she's had a heap o' worrit during the week, and the fact is, she ain't just tidy enough to come into the best parlour.'

Brother Brown's heavy brow darkened.

'"Six days shalt thou labour,"' he said. 'Well, brother, you are the head of your own house, and I leave our unregenerate sister to you. Let us pray.'

Thereupon all, including Madeline, knelt down, while Brother Brown exercised his spirit in a long prayer, with variations and expressions of sympathy in the form of low groans and ejaculations from his companions—who had all again (to resume a former metaphor) retired under water. Emerging once more, and receiving a signal from Brother Brown, Brother Billy Hornblower, an overgrown young bargee of twenty, began a homely hymn, in which all the others gruffly joined.

Pilot the boat to the City of Jesus,
  Up with the tide, though there's danger afloat,
Far up the stream lies the City of Jesus,
  Dark is the night, but we'll pilot the boat.

CHORUS.

  Pilot the boat, mates! pilot the boat!
  Hark, the wind rises—there's danger afloat—
Courage! for up to the City of Jesus,
  Steadily, safely, we'll pilot the boat.

See, mates, the lights of the City of Jesus,
Steer for them lights, thro' the dangers afloat—
Up to the wharves of the City of Jesus,
Ere the tide turns, we must pilot the boat.

CHORUS.

Pilot the boat, mates! pilot the boat!
Hark, the wind rises—there's danger afloat—
Courage! and up to the City of Jesus,
Steadily, safely, we'll pilot the boat.

As the music grew louder, the clatter in the kitchen increased, to the obvious dissatisfaction of Brother Mark. The hymn ceased, and Brother Brown delivered a short sermon, founded on the text, 'Those that go down to the sea in ships,' which was felt to be especially suitable to those who went down the river in barges.

After this, Brother Mark rose, and in a few brief words, interspersed freely with Scriptural quotations, addressed the Brethren, taking for his theme the sacred character of the day, and greatly troubling the soul of little Madeline by gloomy references to dead sinners in their graves.

After a short address to the same effect from Brother Strangeways, a waterside worthy with a very weather-beaten face and a very weather-wise sort of oratory, and another hymn from Brother Billy Hornblower, the service was concluded.

Then, as a concluding solemnity, all shook hands, and the conversation suddenly grew secular.

'Going down with the tide i' the morning, mate?' asked Brother Strangeways. 'It be high water at four, and we be loaded since day afore yesterday.'

'Where for, mate?' asked Uncle Mark.

'Down right away Southam,' was the reply.

'Well, mate, *I* be anchored at home with the old woman till Monday, and then I goes up with first flood to Crewsham Basin.'

'Lime?' asked Brother Strangeways, sententiously.

'Lime it is,' answered Brother Mark, and forthwith the talk became professional.

In the meantime, Brother Brown had drawn from his pocket several loose leaves or tracts, a species of torpedo which he was in the habit of dropping surreptitiously wherever he went, for the confusion of recalcitrant and unrepentant sinners. Selecting three of these, each of which had special reference to the forlorn spiritual condition of a person of the other sex, he proceeded to pin them on the parlour walls — one over the Shepherdess on the mantelpiece, a second under the picture of the Prodigal Son, a third under that of Susannah and the Elders. When this was done he shook hands with Uncle Mark, nodded to Uncle Luke, and passed out of the house; the other men, each with a 'Good night, mate,' for each of the two Peartrees, immediately followed, solemnly, in single file.

No sooner had the street door closed,

than Mrs. Peartree, with the sleeves of her gown tucked up to the elbow, entered the precincts of the chamber. Scorn was in every lineament of her countenance, but directly her eyes fell on the parlour walls, the scorn deepened to wrath.

'Brother Brown's been at them walls again,' she cried. 'I wonder at *you*, Mark Peartree, to sit still and see him do it. Tracts agin your own wedded wife, stuck on the walls of her own best parlour—oh, I'd "tract" him!'

As she spoke, she made a dash at each of the papers in succession, and tore them angrily away.

'My lass,' said Uncle Mark, gruffly, 'read 'em—they're left for your convarsion.'

'Stuff and rubbish!'

'Salvation ain't rubbish, mother, and this here earth's a wale. A wale it is! And let me tell you, tho' you are my missus, it don't become you to put Brother Brown

so much about. Why, while we was a-singing, I heard your clattering the dishes like a barge a-heaving anchor, and I see Brother Brown looking at the door out of the corner of his eyes. No, my lass, it don't become you, and it ain't settin' a good example to little Madlin, who may be a wessel herself by and by.'

'Never, if I can help it,' answered the woman. 'We've wessels enough in *our* family, what with you and Uncle Luke. Look at the mark o' the dirty muddy feet on the clean carpet. I wish you'd meet outside, or in some other house but mine.'

'And I wish *you'd* join us—it'd do you a power of good.'

Mrs. Peartree's only answer was to toss her head and walk back into the kitchen. Uncle Luke followed very crest-fallen and pitiful at the domestic disagreement; while Uncle Mark remained in the parlour, and showed the pictures in Foxe's 'Book of Martyrs'—a precious tome of

tremendous antiquity—to Madeline. The child shuddered as she saw on every page flame consuming those who testified to the truth in evil times.

'Uncle Mark,' she said, 'do they ever burn people *now*?'

'Not in this here world, my lass; only in t'other. And even then only the wery bad ones—them as hates their neighbours, and can come to no manner o' good *without* burning!'

Madeline did not answer, but she thought of Aunt Jane, who was the very essence of gentleness and good nature, but who was made utterly unregenerate by the intensity of her hate for Brother Brown.

CHAPTER IV.

UNCLE MARK PARTS WITH THE OLD BARGE.

WHEN Madeline slipped from her bed on the Tuesday after Easter Monday, drew aside the chintz curtains from her little window and looked forth, she was astonished to see that the sunshine of the preceding days had been followed by a drizzling rain. The river looked black and very solemn as it slipped between its sedgy banks; the marshes, turning a white face to the sullen sky, looked dreary enough as they drank in the falling rain, and the red tiles on the houses of Grayfleet were redder than ever with the ceaseless washing of the showers.

She had slept heavily, but had not yet

wholly recovered from the depression caused by the preaching of the past few days, and of so many hours spent in the sanctuary of the best room.

She dressed hastily, ran down stairs, and peeped into the parlour at the 'weather cottage.' Alas! Joan was under shelter, and Darby was outside. So it was to be a wet day indeed!

The house was very quiet. The front door stood open and a clammy breeze swept into the passage and kissed her cheeks. The parlour had been cleared out an hour before by Aunt Jane's industrious hands, and was carefully prepared for next Sunday. But a clear fire burned in the kitchen, casting its light on the bright paven floor, and upon the buxom figure of Aunt Jane herself, who stood by the table preparing breakfast.

'Eh, bless the child, how you did make me jump!' she exclaimed, as Madeline put her head in at the door. 'Come,

lass, and get your breakfast; 'tis near time you were starting for school.'

After bestowing a hearty kiss on Mrs. Peartree's sunburnt cheek, Madeline took her seat at the table; then suddenly looking round she asked—

'Why, Aunt Jane, where be Uncle Luke?'

'Gone away two hours or more wi' Uncle Mark; they sailed up wi' the tide an hour afore thou was out o' thy bed!'

'Gone to London without *me*!' cried Madeline, her large eyes filling with tears. 'Uncle Luke did promise to take me with him this time!'

'There, there, ha' done wi' your crying, like a good lass!' said Aunt Jane, soothingly. 'Your Uncle Luke he did want to take ye, but I would have none on't this woyage. A pretty like morning to take you from your bed!—why the rain was falling and the wind blowing enough to give you your death. But if you are a

good lass and learn your lessons well you shall go next time. They'll bring down the barge to-morrow, and likely they'll be for taking her back o' Thursday. Then you shall go.'

With this assurance Madeline was fain to content herself. She had been on the barge once or twice when it had lain in Grayfleet basin, opposite the ferry; she had seen it spread out its great red wings and glide along the track of the river—until it looked like a great black swan—passing silently between the marshes, and fading behind the grey mist which for ever hung about them like a cloud; and her childish imaginations had often conjured up pictures of the strange scenes towards which the great black swan was drifting. London was to her the great world, the mysterious city, so different to the dark slimy river and low-lying marshes of Grayfleet. Ever since she could remember, this magic word 'London' had been the

one which had ever urged her on to good deeds, the final goal to which all her virtuous deeds were to lead. Whenever she was bad, Aunt Jane never forgot to repeat the awful words—

'There, Madlin, if you can't be a better lass, you shall never go to London with me and Uncle Mark.'

And when she had been unusually good she never failed to hear the time-worn promise—

'You've been downright good! You shall go to London with me, and see the great waxwork wi' the kings and queens, and the Sleepin' Beauty as large as life.'

When this magical visit was to be paid seemed somewhat indefinite. That Aunt Jane was strongly opposed to what she called 'gadding about,' may be gathered from the fact that during the six-and-twenty years of her married life she had spent only two days out of her own home. But Madeline had been content to hope and

wait on—and dream over the many things she would do when at length the happy day did come. Just before Easter, however, she went half wild with ecstasy—for Uncle Luke, in the exuberance of his gratitude to her for not laughing at him when his curiosity induced him to cut open a cheap concertina, 'to see where the music came from,' promised to take her immediately on to the barge and show her himself the wonderful sights of the great City.

It was a great blow to Madeline to learn that her uncles had departed to the magical place without her, but by the time she had finished her breakfast the sadness caused by the disappointment had worn away. She bestowed another impulsive kiss on Aunt Jane's brown cheek, and taking her books under her arm, trotted off gleefully through the rain towards the great red-brick public school where most of her days were spent.

She was wonderfully light-hearted all day, and when evening came she firmly refused Polly Lowther's invitation to take another dancing lesson, and trotted home to keep Aunt Jane company. She found the kitchen neat and clean as usual, with plates sparkling on the dresser, dishes smiling from the walls, and Mrs. Peartree sitting in their midst with a skein of worsted round her neck, and her busy fingers darning Uncle Mark's guernsey. When Madeline came she laid her work aside and got the tea. The two sat down together.

'Madlin, what in the world be you a-laughing at?' asked Aunt Jane presently, astonished at the continual outbursts and half-smothered laughter of the child.

But for the life of her Madeline would not tell—she only knew that she felt within her a strange hysterical sort of joy which would not be suppressed. Everything made her laugh; the gleaming

dishes, the glancing firelight, the cat purring on the hearth, Aunt Jane's sunburnt face, and even her looks of astonishment and frowns of reproach.

Mrs. Peartree looked distressed; for she was superstitious.

'As sure as you're alive, Madlin,' she cried reprovingly, 'that laugh o' yourn means no good. I mind the day my poor brother Jim were drowned dead—I was laughing like a mad thing afore I got the news. Them as laughs i' the morning will cry before night, I'm thinking.'

At this solemn warning Madeline's hilarity received a sudden check, only to burst out again with renewed vehemence.

''Tis not on account of bad news, Aunt Jane!' she said, ''tis because I'm soon going with Uncle Mark to London!'

But Aunt Jane was not to be convinced. She gravely shook her head, and a few hours later when she put the child to bed, she said—

'There, Madlin, try to go to sleep, do, and give o'er that giggling—'tain't nature for a child to laugh so—and 'twill take all the sleep from my eyes wi' thinkin' o' my poor dear brother that's gone to heaven.'

Madeline promised implicit obedience, and nestled her dark little head into the snowy pillow. When she found herself alone, she slipped from her bed, drew aside the window curtain and looked out, half expecting to see the great black barge sail, like a spectre, through the hazy mist of rain. But no such vision appeared—the faint ray of the young moon showed her the silently sleeping river, through the silvery threads of rain which still fell from the ever-darkening sky.

'Uncle Mark, Uncle Luke!' exclaimed Madeline, clapping her hands, 'make haste and come home, and I'll try not to laugh any more.'

At that moment the barge, with Uncles Mark and Luke on board, was gliding

slowly up the river, ten miles away. The wind had been fair all day and the barge had made good speed, but as night came on and the rain fell faster, the breeze completely died.

The barge lay heavily on the shining river, with the great red sail flapping listlessly above and black shadows all around. They had hoisted the side-lights, and now and then through the impenetrable blackness a faint light answered them—this was the only indication of human life which came to them at all.

Uncle Luke was at the helm, peering with his small keen grey eyes into the blackness; and Uncle Mark was below, eating his supper. Presently the latter passed his red night-capped head out of the hatchway, and gave a sharp glance around him; then his whole long body emerged, and he strolled to Luke's side.

'Well, mate,' he said, 'there don't seem much wind, and I'm a-feared there ain't

much a-coming; suppose you go and turn in?'

But Uncle Luke shook his head decidedly.

'No, no, Mark!' he answered; 'reckon *you're* more knocked up nor what I be. Just you turn in for a bit while 'tis calm—and when the wind comes I'll sing out.'

After a little more discussion as to which should get the first spell of sleep, Uncle Mark descended to the cabin and Luke was left alone.

It was very dreary above, very dark and wet; but Uncle Luke, who was generally in a happy state of mind, seemed quite contented. He grasped the tiller firmly in his hard, horny hand, and fixed his eyes with wonderful keenness upon the moving lights around him.

There was scarcely any wind at all now, and the barge lay like a log; but ever and anon she was lifted up as on a bosom in gentle breathing, while the

great sail flapped listlessly above, and the side-lights shone out like glimmering stars in the darkness, and flashed their brightness at the sky which loomed so darkly overhead.

An hour or so passed thus, and then the rain gradually ceased to fall, the black in the sky began to float gently on before a cold, light wind, which bellied out the sail, swung the heavy boom over the side, and made the barge glide softly on.

Uncle Luke, holding the tiller more firmly, rapped sharply on the deck with his hob-nailed shoes, and in a very short space of time Uncle Mark emerged, fresh and active, from the cabin hatchway.

'Ah, we shall get a goodish bit o' wind before morning, mate,' he said as he took possession of the tiller; 'get the sheets clear, Luke, we mustn't lose much time i' working round;—remember the old barge ain't been over spry sin' she got water-

logged, and there be goodish bit o' traffic here.'

Uncle Luke trotted aft obediently, and now that Mark had relieved him of all responsibility, he turned his mind again to solve the great problem which had been worrying him ever since he left home—whether he should take Madeline a present from the great City, or allow her to buy it for herself when she got there.

While he was speculating thus, his eyes were dreamily surveying the scene around him, and his hands were busy hauling in the sheets, for the breeze was coming more and more ahead, and less upon the quarter.

As the night passed off and day began to dawn, the breeze grew fresher and fresher, until it spread quite fiercely over the surface of the water, driving it up into little crisp wavelets fringed with foam.

The thick black clouds had drifted westwards, and left the east a mass of scarlet and grey. The landscape was still

dim, as with distance, and the light was of that palpitating silvern kind which is neither daylight nor moonlight.

They had left the low-lying marshes of Essex far behind them, and already they could see dimly in the distance, like a cloud brooding over a mountain peak, the smoke which for ever rises above the great City.

The river now seemed alive with traffic, barges beating onwards, laden almost to the water's edge—others running down —steam tugs and ocean steamers, blackening the air with smoke—all twining in and out, passing and repassing, in a bewildering maze.

Uncle Mark still grasped the tiller, and though he performed his task with skill, it was a difficult job. The bends of the river were innumerable; often the wind came dead ahead; the barge was an unwieldy sailer at all times, and now she was overloaded into the bargain. Once or

twice Uncle Mark, miscalculating her power of 'coming about,' had brought her into danger, and had a narrow escape from collision. Then the river grew clearer and the wind came straight on the quarter. She scudded onward merrily, and the water all round her was white with foam.

'Look out, Mark, look out!' cried Uncle Luke presently, and Uncle Mark, stooping to look under the red mainsail, saw that a steam-tug was swiftly steaming down on their course.

'She's straight ahead. Ain't ye goin' to keep away?' screamed Uncle Luke, for the whistling of the wind was deafening.

Mark noted the speed of the barge, then measured the distance between the two.

'All right, mate,' he shouted, 'we'll clear.'

The barge sped on, the tug advanced quickly, Uncle Mark watched, carelessly at first, then anxiously. The tug was woefully

near ; by swerving slightly from her course she could have passed by the barge's stern —by keeping steadily on she seemed likely to cut it through the middle. Uncle Mark concluded that the tug would clear him ; the tug calculated that the barge must 'keep away ;' and she came straight on.

A collision seemed unavoidable, when Uncle Mark screamed—

'Haul in the main sheet!' and, with a cry, he put down the helm.

He had jibbed her as the only chance of escape. The barge swept round before the shrieking wind with her bowsprit within a few inches of the tug's side, quivering through and through as she heeled over, with a thunder crash, almost wrenching out the mast. Then there was a crash, like the bursting of a cannon, a great splash in the water—a shout from the tug.

Uncle Luke, who had been thrown flat on his face, scrambled to his feet to find

the tiller abandoned, the great boom in two, the mast bending like a reed, and Uncle Mark—gone!

Abandoned by the helmsman, the barge swept round into the wind, with her great sails flapping uselessly, and her whole fabric like a drifting wreck.

Confused by the accident and the thunderous sound of shrouds and sails, Uncle Luke, who could not at any time get his ideas to work quickly, gazed about him for a few moments in horrified despair —then he saw that the tug, having reversed her engines, was close upon the barge, and that a boat which she had put out was rowing swiftly towards a figure which was floating, apparently lifeless, on the waves—the figure of Uncle Mark. Dead? It seemed so—the body was moveless, the face livid, and it floated without a struggle.

Suddenly Uncle Luke became aware that the deck of the barge was withdrawing

itself from his feet. The shaking of the mast had wrenched open the timbers—the water was pouring in like a torrent, the barge was rapidly sinking. He leapt into the punt which floated behind, cut the painter with his knife, and, utterly unmindful of the barge, pulled rapidly to the spot where they were rescuing Uncle Mark.

They had got him into the boat by this time, and he lay in the stern motionless, his cheeks ashen grey, his lips bloody, his eyes half closed.

With a wild cry like that of a child, Luke leapt into the boat, abandoning his own, seized the cold wet hand, smoothed back the dripping hair, and began to cry and moan.

'Mark, mate, open your eyes,' he cried. 'What ails you?—don't you know Luke—your brother Luke?'

But Mark answered neither by sign nor word—a splinter of the boom had

struck him senseless, and almost killed him at a blow.

'We'd best take him aboard,' said one of the men; 'see, the barge is sinking fast.'

As he spoke the barge settled down and disappeared, leaving only the point of her topmast visible above the waves. But poor Luke thought nothing of the vessel; his thoughts were full of the injured man.

'Where do ye live, mate,' asked one of the sailors from the tug.

'At Grayfleet, master,' answered Luke, sobbing, and still chafing the cold limp hand. 'And oh, mates, do take him aboard, and get him home quick, and then mayhap he won't die.'

The men agreed to take the two men on board, especially as their course lay past Grayfleet. Nevertheless, as they looked on the face of Uncle Mark, they firmly believed it to be the face of a corpse. But after they had got him

aboard the tug, stripped him of his wet clothes, and administered some restoratives, he heaved a little sigh, and opened his eyes.

'Luke, mate,' he said, recognising his brother, 'try and say a prayer for me. I doubt I'm a dead man!'

CHAPTER V.

UNCLE MARK SAILS UP THE SHINING RIVER.

ALL that night Madeline, sleeping peacefully, had been dreaming happy dreams. Her little feet had been pattering through the busy streets of the Golden City; her wondering eyes had been feasted with all the gay sights, her ears with all the gay sounds, which the wondrous ways afford. When she awoke in the morning, she was a little disappointed, and a good deal astonished, to find herself in her little room at home.

It was broad daylight, and Madeline thought it must be late; Mrs. Peartree stood at the window, gazing dreamily

forth. Madeline lay for a time and watched her; then she said suddenly—

'What are you looking at, Aunt Jane?'

At the sound of the voice the woman turned, and bent to impress her usual kiss on the flushed little cheek on the pillow.

'Get up, Madlin,' she said, ''tis close on eight o'clock, and you'll be late for school again.'

'What were you looking at?' reiterated Madeline, after returning the caress.

'Nought, lass, nought—'twas only one of them little steam tugs that stopped off the ferry and sent a boat ashore—but now the boat has gone back again, and the tug has steamed away.'

'What did it stop for?' asked Madeline, rising on her pillow.

'Bless the lass, how can I tell? for nought that consarns *us*, be sure. There, get up quick, and I'll cut the bread and butter.'

So saying, she departed, and Madeline, slipping from the bed, began to dress herself. She had pretty nearly completed her task, and had her arms raised, and her frock suspended above her head, when the sound of voices reached her from below.

She listened, and recognised the tones of Uncle Luke. Her heart bounded, her cheek flushed, a minute afterwards she flew down the stairs, thrusting her arms into the wrong sleeves, and alighted, radiant, panting, and half-dressed, on the kitchen floor.

It was Uncle Luke sure enough, but how strange he looked! His weather-beaten cheeks were ghastly—his nervous fingers worked at a big hole in his guernsey, he stared about him in perplexed silence, but when Madeline entered he quietly sat down and burst into tears.

'It warn't no fault o' mine, mother,' he sobbed; 'don't think it! He went on

hisself, he jibbed the old barge hisself, and that's how it all came about.'

Mrs. Peartree looked aghast, and her cheeks gradually grew pale too.

'Mercy on us, Luke, can you not speak?' said she, irritably. 'What's happened to Mark? Is he hurted?—is he—killed?'

As she spoke she grew sick at heart with apprehension, and turning at a heavy sound of footsteps came face to face with her husband. He lay upon a stretcher covered with rugs and blankets, and carried by one or two of the Brethren who used to meet in the parlour on Good Friday. His face was deathly pale, but his eyes wandered restlessly about, and when they lighted on his wife's face they gleamed with recognition. He smiled faintly, and stretched towards her a trembling hand—

'Don't 'ee cry, mother,' he said, seeing that her lips trembled and her eyes grew

dim; then, seeing Madeline in the background ready to spring upon him, he added feebly, 'Don't come a-nigh me, little Madlin—I'm a'most worn out.'

Mrs. Peartree was a woman of strong emotions, but she had a wonderful power of self-control. She resolutely choked back the rising desire to scream and fall into hysterics—and laying her brown hand on her husband's cold wet brow, said quietly but firmly—

'Why, Mark, Mark—what's to do? I never thought to see my man brought back to me like this.'

Then motioning Madeline to keep back, she had Uncle Mark carried into the bright warm kitchen, where the breakfast was set, and, bringing in the horsehair sofa from the parlour, drew it up beside the fire, and had him placed thereon.

She had need of her resolution, for all poor Uncle Luke could do in this time of trouble was to sit in a corner and cry like

a child, asserting, with strange vehemence, that he had no hand in the disaster, while Madeline, as if for sympathy, sat by his side and cried too.

The movement and excitement seemed to have completely overpowered Uncle Mark; no sooner did he get upon the couch than he sank back with his eyes closed, and seemed to breathe his last.

Meantime one of the Brethren had run off for the doctor, while another held a glass containing a little whisky, and Mrs. Peartree, taking the drooping head under her arm, poured between the livid lips a few drops of the spirit. At this he seemed to revive a little—he opened his eyes, again recognised his wife, and fixed his gaze on hers.

In a few minutes the messenger returned, flushed and panting from his run. The doctor wasn't at home, he said; he had gone to visit a patient several miles

away; when he returned they would send him on.

Uncle Mark listened, smiling faintly, then he said—

'Ah, I don't want ne'er a doctor, mate. I've got my physic at last, Lord knows.'

'Mark, Mark, don't 'ee talk so,' said Mrs. Peartree, almost breaking down.

But Uncle Mark smiled faintly again, and reached forth his trembling hand towards her.

'Mother,' he said, 'tain't no use denying of it, I'm a-going away. That there spar did the job for me—but nobody's to blame for it, only me;' then, as his wandering gaze fell upon his brother, who sat sobbing in a corner, he asked suddenly—

'Luke, mate, what's come o' th' old barge?'

'She be clean sunk, mate,' returned Luke, dashing away the tears with the back of his rough weatherbeaten hand.

'She be sunk out there in the river, up to Southam Beacon.'

'She was a good wessel,' said Mark, faintly; 'many's the year we sailed her, you and me. And she be sunk at last!'

'O, mate,' cried Uncle Luke, piteously, 'don't take on about that. We'll get her up again, but if you go and die we shall all be adrift together—little Madlin, and mother, and me, and all our hearts 'll be broke.'

Uncle Mark did not reply; he lay back with closed eyes, his breathing was laboured, and the hand which lay in his wife's turned cold as stone.

For a moment Mrs. Peartree's heart sank in dread, for she thought that he was dying, but she neither spoke nor moved; she only clasped the hand a little tighter in her own, and let the scalding tears run down her cheeks.

It was a sorrowful group, and the

warmth and comfort of the surroundings seemed to make the sorrow of parting more keen. There was a death-like silence in the room, the ticking of the old Dutch clock in the corner rang out bell-like and clear, and between the ticks came the stifled sobs of Madeline and Uncle Luke. The kettle was singing on the hob, the cat purring on the hearth, and the sun-rays creeping in through the window touched the bowed heads of those about the sofa, and laid a soft caressing hand on the child's trembling form.

Presently Uncle Mark opened his eyes, and, rousing himself suddenly, gazed wildly about him.

'Luke, mate,' he said, 'that warn't right about the old barge. No, no, she bean't sunk. Why look, there she be a-sailing up to the bridge—only her sails be white—so white—and there be a chap in white at the helm. What's that noise? It be like a steamboat's whistle i' the fog.

Oh, if my head warn't so dazed-like I could hear it—but I be kind o' stupid to-night. Give me a light; it's black dark.'

'Uncle Mark, it's morning,' said Madeline, creeping to his side. 'Dear, dear Uncle Mark, can't you see the sun?'

But Uncle Mark did not seem to hear the child's voice. His eyes were fixed on vacancy, or, rather, on some vision unbeheld of eyes.

'Look out there ahead,' he said faintly. 'There be a white barge coming down with the wind on her quarter, and the waters all black beneath her. Look, there be folk in white standing on her deck and singing. Hark! that be Brother Billy Hornblower's voice, sure—ly?'

Brother Hornblower, who indeed stood near, turned pale at the mention of his name.

'He thinks it's me a-singing,' he observed, brushing his sleeve across his eyes; and he added, bending gently over Uncle

Mark, 'Will I sing a bit of a hymn, Brother Peartree?'

'Aye, aye,' murmured Uncle Mark, closing his eyes.

Whereupon Brother Hornblower, clasping his hands before him and looking on vacancy, commenced to sing in his own peculiar style part of a hymn which was very popular with the Brethren of the river—

Up the shining river,
  Sailing with the tide,
Jesus is my pilot,
  Jesus is my guide.
Steer the wessel, Jesus,
  Steer it night and day,
To the Golden City
  Far, far away.

See how hard 'tis blowing,
  There'll be wind to-night—
Tremble not, my brothers,
  He will steer us right.
Steer the wessel, Jesus,
  Steer it night and day,
To the Golden City
  Far, far away.

While the hymn lasted, Uncle Mark remained lying in his wife's arms as if asleep—he remained so for some time after the hymn was done. The kettle went on singing, the cat went on purring, and the clock seemed to tick with more bell-like clearness than before. When he again opened his eyes the old wandering look had passed away.

'Do you know me, Mark, dear?' asked his wife.

'Aye, mother—I know ye all. There be Luke—there be little Madlin—and that be Brother Billy Hornblower—I've been a-dreaming that he was a-singing to me.'

'And so I were, Brother Peartree,' exclaimed the musician softly.

'Was ye now?' said Uncle Mark, smiling gently. 'Well, mate, I take that as wery kind.'

He closed his eyes again. Brother Hornblower turned his simple face to Mrs. Peartree and whispered—

'There be another werse, Sister Peartree—shall I sing it? He seems to feel it kind o' soothin', and,' he added eagerly, 'them's blessed words.'

Mrs. Peartree nodded; she could not speak, for her tears choked her; and the thin but musical voice piped again—

Who's afraid when Jesus
  Like an angel stands,
Holding sheet and tiller
  In his holy hands?
Steer the wessel, Jesus,
  Steer it night and day,
To the Golden City
  Far, far away.

When the hymn ended this time, Uncle Mark opened his eyes, turned a radiant face to the singer—then he turned to his wife—

'Up the shining river,' he said. 'Aye, there I be a-going straight away. Kiss me, mother, and let little Madlin kiss me too—I be goin' to Jesus—up the shining river to Jesus, mates. It be all for the

best—if it weren't for you three I shouldn't mind goin'.'

'Oh Mark, Mark,' sobbed his wife, now fairly breaking down.

'Mother, don't 'ee take on—there be one at the helm as'll look arter you, and Luke, and little Madlin too. He's taking me away, the old barge be sunk, and I be going up the river, mates—up the shining ri——'

He was silent, and they thought he had passed away.

Those were the last words which Uncle Mark spoke on earth, but he did not die at once. He lay on the sofa for several hours, breathing heavily, like one in a troubled sleep; the time dragged wearily on, the day brightened, then faded, and as the last rays of the setting sun fell across the floor, Uncle Mark heaved his last sigh. He passed away like one in sleep, lying in his wife's arms, and not for several minutes after his last breath was taken did they know that he was dead.

CHAPTER VI.

MADELINE IS ABOUT TO REALISE HER DREAM.

For several days Uncle Mark lay solemnly silent in the front parlour. An inquest was held over him, and a careful inquiry made into the manner of his death, the jury bringing in a verdict to the effect that the people in the tug were in no respect to blame, and that the fatal result was entirely 'accidental.'

At last, amid general grief, Uncle Mark was carried to his last home.

The Brethren, with solemn faces, bore him to his grave; and when the simple service was over, one of them stood forward, and, with tears in his eyes, chanted forth the words of the simple hymn which

he had sung to Brother Mark as he passed away.

Up to this Mrs. Peartree, who stood with the men at the grave, had borne her burthen well, but no sooner did she hear the hymn which had ceased, as it were, with her husband's dying breath, than she wailed and broke down. For a time all the bitterness of that sudden parting came back upon her; she clasped the hand of little Madeline, who stood by her, and burst into passionate tears.

But she could not indulge her stormy grief for long; troubles and necessities clamoured like wolves around her, and turned her soul sick with a new fear. Now that her strong husband was gone, the whole weight of their little household was upon her; and no sooner was he in his grave than she had to speculate upon the future. The verdict of the jury destroyed all chance of receiving any compensation from the owners of the tug, and indeed

Mrs. Peartree never dreamed of putting in any claim. Her husband's earnings had been small, but she had managed to save a little, enough to keep her for a week or so—'to turn herself round,' as she expressed it—while she decided what was best to be done.

That Luke Peartree was thrown upon her hands she knew from the moment of her husband's death. As we have said, he was generally regarded as a kind of natural; and everybody knew that had it not been for his brother he would never have got work at all. Mark Peartree had been a skilful bargeman, and in order to secure his services the barge-owners had been quite willing that he should sail with his brother as mate. Consequently, Mrs. Peartree knew that it was quite useless for him to seek for work alone. For a time she was at her wits' end to know what to do with him.

Suddenly she remembered that he had

a cousin across the river in Kent who might be willing to give him work on a riverside farm.

She wrote, and got for answer that Joss Peartree wanted an odd hand, and would be glad, for kinship's sake, to take on 'Cousin Luke.'

Luke cried like a child when the news was told him, and Mrs. Peartree cried a bit too. It was like another death, this thought of parting with simple Luke, but what was she to do? She could not keep him; it was as much as she could do to keep herself—and the only prospect she saw of doing this was to go out as a monthly nurse, a post for which she was specially suited. Meantime her little store of money was rapidly diminishing, and each coin that was taken out warned her that her household must break up soon.

After she had cried silently for a time, she resolutely dried her eyes, and set about comforting Uncle Luke. She promised

that if he would only try to be happy she would try to visit him once or twice a year—and after she had earned a little, she would try to rent a small room in Grayfleet, and make it a home where Luke could come and stop again with her. This assurance comforted Luke a good deal; at the same time it made him more keenly alive to what was taking place, and he asked, suddenly—

'Be you a-going to give up the house then, mother?'

'Ay, Luke—where be my means to keep it on?'

'And to sell the bit o' furniture?'

'Yes, mate.'

'Then what'll become o' little Madlin?'

Mrs. Peartree glanced uneasily at the child, who was seated on a footstool by her side; then motioning Luke to be silent, she said hurriedly—

'Oh, *I'll* look after Madlin, never fear.'

But a day or so later, when Madeline was gone to school, Mrs. Peartree went on with the subject as if it had never been stopped.

'I've been thinking about Madlin, Luke, and I've decided to send her away too.'

'What! part wi' Madlin?' cried Luke, aghast, and for a moment it seemed to him that Mrs. Peartree was growing very hard-hearted, but when he looked up he saw that her eyes were dim with tears.

'Ay, mate, part wi' our Madlin,' she said, sorrowfully. 'It a'most broke my heart when I thought on't first, but I'm past that now. 'Twill be for the child's good too. If she stopped wi' us, she'd get but a poor bringing-up at best, bless her; but if she goes to *him* he'll make a lady on her.'

'*Him*, mother?'

'Mr. White, that first brought her to us, and pays to this day for her keep.

He's not her father, nor yet much kin of hers at all; but for all that he's a good gentleman, and will do his duty by her. We'll try him, anyways. If he takes her it will be a sore day for me, but a lucky chance for little Madlin.'

Uncle Luke listened quietly, and soon endorsed Aunt Jane's opinion, that the very best they could do for Madeline was to take her up to London and hand her over to the care of her natural guardian —the benevolent-looking gentleman who left her at the cottage when an infant, and had contributed to her maintenance ever since.

'Don't let her know nothing about it, Luke,' added Mrs. Peartree, 'or Lord only knows what she would do. After she's growed up, bless her, she'd thank us for doin' it, even if we could help it, which we can't.'

This piece of logic pleased Uncle Luke unmeasurably, and he went to bed toler-

ably contented with Aunt Jane's mode of working, and quite convinced that she was doing everything for the best.

The succeeding days were very sad ones in the cottage, and though Madeline was almost overwhelmed with her grief for Uncle Mark, she could not help wondering at the strange conduct of those whom he had left behind. If she happened to come within arm's length of Aunt Jane she was certain to be caught up and kissed; if Uncle Luke's eye fell upon her, he burst into tears; at meal times she had three times too much food crammed upon her plate; if she approached the fire, her chair was drawn so close as to almost scorch her. But the crowning point came when she was told one morning that she was to go to London, for a day's 'outing' with Uncle Luke.

It was decided that Luke should take her. 'He had seen a good deal of the city,' Mrs. Peartree said, 'and would do

the errand better than she.' Luke was quite contented, so it was settled forthwith.

Despite her bereavement, Madeline could not help feeling glad at the thought of realising her dream at last. Childish griefs are not very enduring, and at another time a visit to London would have sent her mad with joy. But her pleasure was considerably damped when she saw Aunt Jane cry so, and Uncle Luke look so very sad.

'Madlin, darlin',' cried Mrs. Peartree, embracing her for the twentieth time, 'you're a-going to see kind friends up in London; and maybe, if you're a good girl, they'll ask you to stay a bit, and see the wax-work, and all the fine sights. And if you stay, don't forget your Aunt Jane that brung you up, and loves you so dear—God bless 'ee, Madlin! God bless 'ee, and make a lady of ye—my own little darling gel!'

Quite bewildered, the child suffered herself to be led away by Uncle Luke.

After ferrying across the river and walking a mile, they reached the railway station.

When she got into the train her contentment in a measure returned. She nestled up to Uncle Luke's side, stealing her little hand into his, and looked with rapture at the fields gliding past her so rapidly—at the river with its shining bends. As she went on her wonder deepened, and her excitement grew—for she passed little towns, then big stations covered with shining pictures, like palaces —until at length, when she felt deep in Dreamland, they glided under a great arch of glass, and Uncle Luke, exclaiming 'Here we be,' rose up and prepared to alight from the train.

CHAPTER VII.

INTRODUCES A DISTINGUISHED LITERARY BOHEMIAN.

STILL lost in wonder, Madeline alighted from the train, and clutching Uncle Luke's hand, moved along with the crowd that was surging out of the station.

Once outside, amidst the din of rattling cabs and excited passengers, Uncle Luke seemed perplexed what to do next. He took off his high hat, and scratched his head; and this appeared to remind him that he had a paper carefully tucked into the hat's lining. So he searched for and found the paper, on which was written, in a round, clear hand—

MARMADUKE WHITE, Esq.,
The Den,
Willowtree Road,
St. John's Wood.

In his perplexity he turned to a policeman, and, with his usual grin, showed him the paper. The policeman, who happened to be good-natured, informed him that he must walk across London Bridge, and make the best of his way to the Bank, where he would get an omnibus which would take him straight to his destination.

'When you get to the Bank, look for a "City Hatlas"—you'll see "City Hatlas" written on the outside. You can't go wrong.'

Thus instructed, Uncle Luke toddled off as fast as his legs could carry him, and was swept along with the traffic that sets all day from London Bridge Station over the great Bridge. Madeline clung to him in amazement and terror, with her great wistful eyes wide in wonder.

As they passed over the bridge and saw the river gleaming, she uttered a cry, and would have stopped to gaze, but her

Uncle pulled her along, being far too excited for explanation or conversation.

In due time they reached the Bank, and now a fresh perplexity occurred, for the little man had quite forgotten the policeman's directions. Madeline, however, remembered, and spying an omnibus labelled 'City Atlas' hurried him towards it.

He showed his paper to the conductor.

'All right,' said that worthy; 'jump in.'

And soon they were well afloat in the great stream of London, with the waters roaring and mingling and crying around them. Madeline gazed out, and her wonder deepened as she saw the great shining shops, and the innumerable horses and vehicles, and the people ever coming and going, like waves of a sea. She thought it beautiful, a kind of terrible Fairyland, and it would have given her perfect pleasure if her heart had not been so full of a great grief. For the time being,

indeed, she almost forgot her childish trouble in the strange new sense of a vast and troubled world, of whose mysterious motions she had never dreamed.

It was a long ride, but it seemed only to occupy a few minutes. Uncle Luke was silent, crushed by his sorrow and by the situation; he held her hand tight, and fixed his poor sad eyes on vacancy, seeing and hearing nothing, only conscious that he had a task to perform, and determined, though his heart should break, that he would perform it to the end.

At last they left the long thoroughfares behind, and came out into a region comparatively green and countrified, with villas of all tastes and sizes ranged on either side of the road. Here the omnibus stopped, and the conductor told Uncle Luke to alight, announcing that they were at the corner of Willowtree Road, and that the address written on the paper must be close by. So Uncle Luke alighted

with Madeline, paid their fare, and stood hesitating, while the omnibus rolled away.

Willowtree Road consisted, from end to end, of detached and semi-detached villas, only variegated at two of the corners by public-houses. It was very quiet and suburban, and as all the trees in the gardens were already green, and many of them in flower, it looked quite rural and bright.

Paper in hand Uncle Luke trotted up and down for some time, in a vain search for the house he sought. The road was quite deserted, and there was no one whom he could consult. At last he came against a telegraph boy, sauntering along and whistling in the leisurely manner of those swift Mercuries of the period.

'I've just come from there,' said Mercury, after inspecting the paper. 'You see that house with the verander? Well, you don't go up the front steps, but walk round to the side, and you'll see a bell

marked "Stoodio;" ring that, and ask for Mr. White.'

Thus directed, Uncle Luke approached the house, a small, semi-detached villa, and, passing round, as directed, to the side, discovered, with some little difficulty, the bell in question. Without any hesitation, he rang. Scarcely had he done so, when the door opened as it were of its own accord, and he found himself in a dilapidated garden, face to face with a small building which looked like a diminutive Methodist chapel. Approaching the door of this edifice, he was about to knock, when his eyes fell upon a paper pasted upon it. On this paper was printed rather than written these words—

Mr. White out of town. Back this day week.

With Madeline's aid Uncle Luke spelt out the inscription, and it filled him with complete consternation. There being no date to the announcement, 'this day week' was curiously indefinite, particularly as the

paper showed signs of having been there for a considerable time already. While he stood gaping and scratching his head the studio door suddenly opened, and a very small boy with a very old face, clad in a very dirty page's uniform, made his appearance.

'Well, what is it?' cried this worthy, snappishly. 'Who do you want?'

Uncle Luke took off his hat respectfully, and handed over the paper. Strange to say, the boy would not deign to inspect it.

'If it's the milk bill, you're to call again next week. If it's a summons, nobody ain't at home. Which of the gents is it for?'

'I'm a-looking for Master White,' said Uncle Luke, timidly, 'and if you please——'

'But he don't please,' answered the boy, with a fierce sense of grievance.

'He ain't at home. Didn't you see the paper on that there door?'

At this juncture another head appeared in the background, and a pair of human eyes seemed rapidly to inspect the intruders. Then a voice said—

'It's all right, Judas. Let 'em come in.'

Thus instructed, the page threw open the door, and Uncle Luke entered, with Madeline clinging to him. Their astonishment was considerable when they found themselves in a large apartment, lighted by glass windows from above, and full of all the paraphernalia of an artist's workshop—several easels, two or three lay figures, paintings in various states of completion. In one corner stood a stove, on the top of which was a loaf of brown bread and a tin coffee pot, and close to the stove was a perfect hecatomb of egg-shells. Indeed, what with general dust and débris of all kinds, the entire 'studio' seemed sadly in need of cleaning out.

Fronting them as they entered was the only tenant of the apartment—a young man with a very light moustache, a watery blue eye, and a large amount of unkempt flaxen hair. He grasped a palette in one hand, a paint brush in the other, and in his mouth he held a black meerschaum pipe.

'Is it anything I can do for you?' he said, with a rather vacant smile. 'I'm Mr. Cheveley.'

'I want to see Master White,' said Uncle Luke in a faltering voice. 'I've come all the way from the country, all along o' Madlin, here. Haven't I, Madlin? If so be he's away, can't some one fetch him, and tell him Luke Peartree wants him, and that Uncle Mark's dead, and that poor Aunt Jane's a widder, and that things has all gone contrary, and all our hearts is broke?'

Tears rose in Uncle Luke's eyes, and he stood choking, while Madeline clung to

him and began crying too. The young man looked at them in astonishment for some minutes; then, struck by an idea, he walked rapidly to an inner door and cried loudly—

'Here, White.'

A sleepy voice answered from within—

'What's the matter?'

'Some one to see you—come, get up!'

The answer seemed a combination of strong expressions, combined with inarticulate groans. After listening for a moment, Cheveley turned to Uncle Luke—

'Here, I say!' he said, with the vacant helpless manner peculiar to him. 'He's writing in bed, and he won't rise. You'd better go in and explain your own business. The little girl can wait here.'

Not without some little fear and trembling, Uncle Luke released Madeline's hand, and moved with timid steps into the inner room. It was a very small chamber, furnished as a bedroom; that is to say, it

contained an iron bedstead, a washstand, a table, and other conveniences. A chest of drawers gaping open was covered with articles of attire in most admired disorder, and other articles were hung on the walls or scattered about the room.

Perched up on the bed, with an embroidered smoking-cap on his head, was a gentleman in gold spectacles. He was writing rapidly with a pencil in a large manuscript book, and he scarcely looked up as Uncle Luke entered.

But when Uncle Luke, whose heart was full and overflowed at the sight of one whom he believed to be a friend of the family, trotted over to the bedside and took his hand, crying like a child, he dropped his notebook and seemed aghast. Then, recognising his visitor, he questioned him, and soon knew the whole sad story—of Uncle Mark's accidental death, of the break-up of the little home, of the despair of the family, and their conviction

that they could no longer do their duty by Madeline.

'And Madlin's here,' cried Uncle Luke. 'I brung her, but, Lord, she don't guess *why* I brung her; she thinks she's a-going back. Oh, Mr. White, be a father to her! She ain't got ne'er another, now her Uncle Mark's dead.'

Mr. White wiped his spectacles, and seemed utterly stupefied; at last he nodded, as if he had made up his mind.

'Give me those trousers,' he said, 'I'll get up.'

In another minute he had slipped into an old pair of tweed trousers, a pair of very dirty fancy slippers, and an old dressing-gown. Thus attired he even looked less engaging than when composing in bed. His hands were greatly in need of soap, his whiskers were ragged and ornamented with fragments of yolk of egg, and his face, which was otherwise kindly and good-humoured, looked parboiled. Seizing a

brush, he went through the formality of brushing the very minute bunches of hair which ornamented his bald head, and then, after a momentary struggle with his whiskers, led the way into the 'studio.'

Here they found Madeline in high delight, for Cheveley, seizing a piece of charcoal, had dashed off a rough likeness of her on a canvas which stood vacant. The wild locks, the great wistful eyes, the delicate mouth, were happily caught, and for the moment the child forgot all her troubles.

'Look, Uncle Luke,' she cried, running to him and pointing out the likeness. 'It's *me*.'

Uncle Luke, still pale and trembling with his great grief, grinned from ear to ear, and gazed upon the artist in pathetic admiration. Meantime White stood blinking benignly through his spectacles; at last Madeline caught his look, and returned it with no little astonishment.

'This is Madlin,' said Uncle Luke, gently.

Thus introduced, Madeline dropped her eyes timidly, and gave a country curtsey, as she had been accustomed to do to the magnates of the village.

CHAPTER VIII.

UNCLE LUKE IS BROKEN-HEARTED.

It appeared on explanation that the notice on the outside door of the 'studio' was a common ruse of Mr. Marmaduke White whenever he desired perfect solitude, and when the visits of even friends and acquaintances, not to speak of ambassadors from certain adamantine creditors, would be considered irksome.

Although White dwelt in a studio, he was not an artist—not, that is to say, an artist by profession, though he could paint a little, and had a very pretty feeling for colour. By profession he was a man of letters; by special taste and habit, a writer for the theatre. Some of his less ambitious plays had been acted with no little

éclat, and everybody had thriven through them except the author. Others had failed, and these failures constituted his glory. They were really productions of considerable literary merit. In literary circles White was spoken of as a man of genius whose mission it was to revive 'the poetical drama,' but who had fallen on dark days, when the Muses, having discarded classic drapery altogether, had taken to fleshings and the *can-can*.

He was a gentle creature, with as soft a heart as ever throbbed in human bosom, and as little power of managing his worldly affairs as of creating a profitable taste for dramas in 'five acts and in blank verse.' He lived in a studio, with one artist or another for a companion, not because the place was necessary for his vocation, but because he was naturally a Bohemian, and a studio was a thoroughly Bohemian sort of abode. He was forty years of age, unmarried, and unlikely to marry. The

number of his follies could only have been measured by the number of his good deeds, and those were legion. To see him was to like him; to know him was to love him well.

For years past he had paid a small stipend—not much, but a sharp pinch sometimes to him—for the maintenance of Madeline. The way in which he had contracted this responsibility was characteristic, and may at once be explained. A friend of his who was a 'genius'—that is to say, an individual who promised prodigies, and on the strength of his promises, which were never fulfilled, discarded all conventional morality and lived the life of a shabby Don Juan—had become entangled with a country girl. Dying penitent, as well as penniless, he confided to White, who watched by his sick bed like a woman, that he had betrayed the girl, and that she had given birth to a child, then about one year old. White

promised that he would seek both mother and child, and help them if possible. So after putting his poor friend into the ground, and moving heaven and earth to get a few tender things about him inserted in the newspapers, White betook himself to the lonely seaside village where the widow dwelt. He found a comely but ignorant girl, in a state of comparative destitution, and to make matters worse, in the last stage of consumption, brought on by exposure and neglect. In the course of the interviews which ensued, he learned such things of his dead friend's treacherous and selfish conduct as would have shaken his faith in genius altogether had he been less simple-hearted. A little later the girl died in his arms, giving him her last blessing and consigning her little daughter to his care.

After considerable reflection, he decided that the best course he could adopt with the little one was to find some good

motherly soul, in the mother's sphere of life, who would rear her kindly. During an artistic excursion to Grayfleet he discovered Mrs. Peartree, and, after certain pecuniary preliminaries were arranged, committed the child to her care. What had been originally only a temporary arrangement presently became fixed and habitual. Years passed away. Madeline remained with the Peartrees, who were childless. White, in a very irregular manner, sent them small sums from time to time ; but it had never occurred to him to take any more serious responsibility in the matter. He meant the girl to grow up happy in the sphere to which her mother belonged. Though he had beheld her once or twice in infancy, he had for years afterwards seen nothing of her, only hearing of her existence through correspondence from time to time.

When, therefore, Uncle Luke turned up in St. John's Wood, with Madeline

under his charge, and explained that sad events had broken up the little home and left Madeline helpless on their hands, White was staggered. It was clear that the Peartrees thought him her natural guardian, and could not comprehend that he stood in no closer relationship to her than they did themselves.

He looked at Madeline, and was astonished to see her so fair and elf-like, with a touch in her eyes of his poor dead friend, the literary Bohemian. Somehow or other he had always pictured her as a fat little country cherub, with very hard cheeks, a pug nose, and ugly feet. As she gazed at him with her great blue eyes, he felt troubled more and more.

'You don't remember poor Fred Hazelmere?' he said to Cheveley. 'No, he was gone before your time. But you've read his "Ballads of Bohemia"—by Jove, sir, some of them are worthy of the "Buch der

Lieder."' And he added in a whisper, 'That's his child.'

He had led Cheveley aside, and was conversing with him apart, while Madeline and Uncle Luke sat waiting in the centre of the studio. 'Look at her face,' he proceeded. 'Never saw such a likeness in my life—it quite turns me over. She looks a wild little thing, don't she? The man with her is a sort of natural. It was absurd to think of sending her to me, for what on earth can I do with her? *I'm* not her father, after all. Upon my soul, I'm in a dilemma. I must persuade him to take her back.'

But when White took Uncle Luke aside and tried to explain matters to him, the little man only began to cry. The home was broken up, he said; Aunt Jane's only means of subsistence was to go out as a monthly nurse; and he himself was going to join a distant relation on the coast of Kent.

'It ain't that we want to lose her,' he asseverated; 'but oh, Master White, there be no home for Madlin now. Our hearts be broke, sir, to part wi' her; but we know you're next door to her father, and a gentleman born. She'll be a heap better off here than ever she was along of us.'

'Here?' gasped the dramatist.

'She's your'n, sir, more than our'n, bless her heart. We couldn't feed her no more, let alone clothe her, now Mark's gone to glory; but you're a gentleman born and can bring her up well-nigh like a lady. I brung her, Master White,' he continued, reverting to his first fear; 'but I dustn't let her know I'm a-going to leave her—I dustn't, indeed. She thinks she's a-going back with me.'

'But I can't take her!' exclaimed White. 'This is no place for a child, and even if it were she needs a woman's care. I really can't think of it; the very idea's absurd.'

Uncle Luke looked astonished. In his simple judgment, the power of a 'gentleman born,' like Mr. White, was unlimited, and he could not fathom the significance of his refusal.

'She's that good,' he explained gently, 'that she'd be no manner o' trouble to any, 'cept when she's in her tantrums, and they're gone as soon as come. And she's clever, Master White. I've heerd schoolmaster say that she can spell like a good 'un, and her writin's as clear as print. I see her write out the Lord's Prayer on a piece of paper, and she guv it to her Uncle Mark, and if he'd ha' lived, he was a-going to get it framed like a pictur' and hung up on the cabin of the barge.'

This special pleading had little or no effect on White. He was puzzling his brain what to do. Once or twice he thought of repudiating the responsibility altogether, but he was far too good-natured for that. Then he suggested that Luke

should take the child back and leave him to think it over, but he soon discovered that such a delay was impracticable.

'Mother said,' explained Uncle Luke, firmly (his sister-in-law, it will be remembered, had always been addressed as 'mother' by her husband, and by all the house), 'mother said I was to leave her along o' you, cause you was her best friend; and mother said you'd never grudge her the wittles what she eat, for you were a gentleman born. Them were her own words. You'd never grudge her the wittles what she eat, for you was a gentleman born.'

'How old is she?' asked White, desperately, not that he had any special reason for asking, but because, in his perplexity, he hardly knew what to say.

Uncle Luke cocked his eye, calculating, and after due deliberation replied—

'Mother says it be just eight year come Whit-Monday since you brung her

to us. She remembers the year well, mother does, 'cause 'twas the year when her cousin Jim he was drownded off Woolwich Pier, arter he had deserted and was running away for his precious life; and they held a 'quest upon him, and said he was drownded accidental, and had hisself to blame.'

'Between eight and nine years old,' muttered White, pursuing his own feeble reflections. 'Is there no place where she could be put? No person who, for a small consideration, would take her in?'

Uncle Luke shook his head dolefully. He had never questioned for a moment but that White would give the child a welcome, and he was quite incapable of conceiving the manifold objections there might be to her immediate adoption.

Things were at this juncture when Madame de Berny, who occupied the adjoining house, and from whom White rented the studio, came in smiling. She

was a stout little old lady, with a very profound respect for her tenant, who had been useful to her in many ways, as indeed he was almost invariably to everybody with whom he came in close contact. To his surprise she cut the Gordian knot by offering to take care of the child on White's behalf.

All this time Madeline had been listening with growing suspicion. At last the whole truth dawned upon her, and she burst into lamentation. Clinging to Uncle Luke, she cried that she would never leave him, and that she would return to Grayfleet in his company.

It was an exciting scene, over which we have no intention to linger.

Uncle Luke did not depart that night. They made him up a bed in the corner of the studio, where he lay awake till morning, weeping and wondering, but still firm in his desire to see Madeline made into a little lady. The child herself was taken

care of by Madame de Berny. But she would not depart from the studio until Uncle Luke had avowed positively that he would be there, waiting for her, in the morning. His simple promise satisfied her, for never in all her life had she known him to break his word.

CHAPTER IX.

MADELINE FINDS NEW FRIENDS.

THE next day Uncle Luke went away.

Words would fail us to describe the parting. The little man wept like a child, and Madeline threw herself, again and again, into his arms, in a perfect frenzy of passion. It was terrible to see so fierce a storm shaking the fragile form of so young a child. Madame de Berny led her, sobbing, into the house, and tried in vain to give her consolation; but for hours upon hours she wept wildly, and her little heart seemed broken.

Poor Marmaduke White was utterly at a loss how to act; but he had resolved, come what might, to accept his burthen

and bear it as well as he could. Every look, every gesture of the child, especially during her fierce access of sorrow, reminded him more and more of his dead friend. Her weird and elf-like beauty, moreover, appealed to his strong artistic sense. Yes, he would do what he could for her, and trust to that Providence which feeds the literary raven, to find him ways and means.

During his perplexity, he found an excellent adviser in Madame de Berny. The good woman, who had a large heart for children, entered cordially into his wishes, and at the end of a long consultation readily undertook the charge of Madeline for the time being. She had plenty of leisure on her hands, the Chevalier de Berny, her husband, a professor of music, being from home, teaching, all day, while her only daughter, an actress at the Pall Mall Theatre, was engaged every evening, and nearly every day, in the pur-

suit of the business and the pleasures of her profession.

So it was speedily settled, and Madeline was soon installed, as an informal boarder, in the De Berny household, having a little room upstairs next to the gorgeous chamber occupied by Mademoiselle Mathilde.

The grief of childhood heals quickly, and with childhood's inquisitiveness Madeline was soon busy observing the manners and customs of her new friends. Though her heart was still wild and weary, and though every night she sobbed as she thought of her happy home at Grayfleet, hers was too quick and keen a nature to be quite deadened by its sorrow.

And Madame de Berny was very kind; even Aunt Jane could not have been kinder. As to the Chevalier, who came in late at night and departed very early in the morning, she found him a fat, fretful, overworked, but naturally good-hearted little

Frenchman, who spent the whole of his one leisure day, Sunday, in smoking a big pipe and reading the French journals. But the queen of the dwelling was Mathilde, a tall, thin blonde, with golden hair, very fine eyes, and a very hard mouth. She dressed very loudly and used a great deal of paint and powder; her whole style, indeed, was 'fast,' and though she was a Frenchman's daughter, her conversation and all her ideas were vulgarly suggestive of Cockaigne.

Her character, however, was unimpeachable; she was far too calculating and worldly wise to commit herself in any way. Her parents adored her. She had the best room in the house, a little study also where she conned her parts, and these were as the sanctuary of a saint. The Chevalier was firmly convinced that she was only prevented by the malice and wickedness of the world from becoming recognised as a great actress.

'My daughter is too good,' he would say to his friends; 'it is her virtue which keep her back. If she vere like de rest of de vomen on your stage, it would be different—*ah ciel*, yes! De managers are in a conspiracy to give her bad parts and to break her leetel heart.'

And Mathilde herself was of the same opinion. Her face was quite worn and haggard with brooding over her professional wrongs, her heart torn daily by the success of her rivals and the real or fancied neglect of the public. Once or twice a week she had violent fits of hysteria, during which she would think and talk of suicide. Recovering from these, she would eat a hearty dinner and drink large quantities of bottled stout—to which she was very partial, chiefly because it was said to be fattening and her enemies in the stalls considered her too lean.

In the eyes of Madeline, who had hitherto only known the coarse beauties of

Grayfleet, Mathilde was a vision of loveliness. The child loved colour and splendour and beauty, and Mathilde seemed to represent all these. The actress's bedroom, too, was like a palace of enchantment; with its delicate rose-coloured curtains, its white French bed and bedding, its bright carpet, and its delicious perfumes.

Mathilde was not particularly fond of children, but homage from anyone pleased her, and thus it happened that Madeline became a constant visitor in the sanctuary. When, one day, Mathilde opened her wardrobe and showed all her magnificent costumes, both those she used in private life and those she reserved for the theatre, the bliss of the sight was almost too much to bear. It was like a glimpse of heaven itself!

So the weeks passed away, and the new strange life was growing gradually familiar. The thought of the little Grayfleet home was still bright in the child's

mind, and every night she said a prayer that Uncle Luke had taught her, and every night she cried when she went over the beloved names, but her spirit was kindled into a new kind of feverish activity, such as she had never been conscious of before.

In the course of her daily visits to the studio, where even the misanthropic Judas, as he had been profanely christened on account of his forbidding aspect, now gave her a welcome, she saw many things which awakened her wonder. Her previous ideas of Art had been chiefly connected with house-decoration and sign-painting, and she marvelled much at the creations on canvas of young Mr. Cheveley. For White she soon contracted a passionate affection, which deepened into idolatry when the good-natured Bohemian began, in his idle moments, to teach her to draw.

The quickness with which she learned

the rudiments of this accomplishment reminded White that her general education was being neglected altogether.

'My dear,' he said to her, one afternoon, 'I think I shall have to send you to school.'

She was standing at his side, looking over his shoulder, as he 'touched up' for her a picture of a house which reeled to one side like the leaning tower at Pisa, a tree or two like inverted mops, and a very shabby-looking bridge.

She looked at him right in the eyes, which was her custom.

'I hate school,' she said emphatically.

'So did I at your age, and the child who doesn't always comes to be hung. But I really think you'd pay for a little schooling. You write a shocking hand, to begin with.'

'Uncle Luke said it was *beau*tiful writing, and as clear as print.'

'Humph! well, you see, he looked at

it from a different point of view. I don't question its legibility, which after all is the first thing to be aimed at, but it wants style. Then, your grammar is more shady than befits the protégée of a master-stylist, like myself.'

'What's grammar?' asked Madeline, swinging her right foot irritably. 'Nouns, verbs, "I am," "thou art," and all that? I hate 'em all.'

White laid down the drawing on which he had been busy, and took her by the two hands.

'You hate a good many things,' he said, mildly. 'Pray, what do you particularly like?'

'I like drawing. I like to hear Mamzelle singing the pretty songs, and trying on her new dresses. I like dancing, too, and music, and all that. And I like to be here with *you*. I like you better than Mr. Cheveley. If I was big enough I'd *marry* you, and then you could

take me to the theayter, where Mamzelle goes.'

'Pronounce it theatre,' said White, while his eyes opened in amused wonder. 'So you are beginning to think of marrying already, are you? Precocious child! And you'd marry *me*, would you? Why, I'm old enough to be your father, and by the time you are a young woman I shall be quite on the shelf.'

Madeline surveyed him for some moments critically; then she threw her arms round his neck and kissed him impulsively.

'When I marry you, Mr. White,' she said, 'I'll buy you a nice wig, and then, you see, no one will know.'

'A wig—the gods forbid!'

'A beautiful *black*, like the Chevalier wears. I know it's a wig, because he takes it off and puts on a nightcap when he goes to bed.'

White threw back his head and laughed

heartily; then forcing a serious look into his face, he said—

'Don't let us wander from the subject; I began by saying that you must go to school.'

Madeline's face darkened, and her lips pouted.

'I shan't,' she said.

'Come, come, Madeline! Don't you care to learn?'

'No.'

'Nevertheless, learning is a physic which you will be compelled to take. You mustn't grow up a little ignoramus. English, grammar, geography, and—yes, by Jove—you shall learn French and music.'

'French!' she cried, with a sudden sparkle in her eyes. 'Like Mamzelle talks sometimes to her pa?'

'Exactly.'

'And music! I love music! And then I shall understand every word they say, and play like Mamzelle on the piano. Oh,

Mr. White, do let me go to school and learn French and music!'

All opposition being thus speedily withdrawn, White determined that Madeline should go to school forthwith. In his customary fashion, therefore, he dismissed the subject from his mind; and it is a question how soon he would have practically carried out the scheme if Madeline herself had not worried him every day with the question, 'Oh, Mr. White, when am I to go to school and learn French and music?' But after a consultation with the Chevalier, a school was found in the neighbourhood—which he himself attended two or three times a week—and after a slight discussion over terms, which were specially reduced in her case, Madeline was sent there as a day scholar.

Once or twice since her translation to London, Madeline had heard from her foster-mother, who was then going from house to house as a monthly nurse. Mrs.

Peartree could not write herself, but she sent by deputy many fond and loving messages, which Madeline answered with letters a thousand times more passionate. Since the day of their parting, however, she had heard nothing from Uncle Luke.

But some few weeks after she went to school there arrived a letter for her bearing the post-mark of a small town in Essex. Opening it eagerly, she read as follows :—

Mi dere Madlin,—This comes from uncle Luke, hopping you are quite wel and a good gel which it leaves me at pressent. I be ni art-broke far away from you and mother working on the river down alonger mi cussin Joss don't kry cos I brung you to London but be a good gel and give my umble respecs to Mister wite mi dere Madlin mi dere Madlin there be no bargis in thes parts and neer a brethren but aples be pourful big and I wish you see the aple-tree in cussin Joss his garding with luv & kisses & hopping you are a good gel & mi umble respecks to mister wite good bi at present I am ever fecksonit uncle luke peartree.

P.S. Be a good gel & don't kri cos I brung you.

Many and many a burning kiss did

Madeline press on this simple epistle. She wetted it with her most tender tears, and placed it beneath her pillow at night, and carried it about all day in her bosom, to be kissed and kissed yet again. With a certain intuitive shame, she did not show it to any member of the De Berny family, whose fault was a snobbishness characteristic of shabby gentility, but she fearlessly confided in Mr. White and let him read it through. He was touched by its simple affection, penetrating through the rude orthography to the staunch and loving soul of the writer; and he encouraged the girl to talk to him of Uncle Luke and all her lowly friends.

'Those who did not know him,' he thought, as he listened to her eager words and watched her flushed face, 'called poor Fred callous. It's a lie! He had a noble heart. and so, thank God, has his little child!'

CHAPTER X.

A TELEGRAPHIC THUNDERBOLT.

BUT only a few days later, as White sat alone in the studio working at the scenario of a new play, the door was thrown open and in rushed Madeline. Her hair was dishevelled, her dress disordered, her whole face distorted with passion. Before he had time to speak she threw herself on a sofa and burst into an agony of tears.

'Madeline!' he cried, bending over her, 'what is the matter? Why are you not at school?'

For a time there was no answer, but at last, between the sobs, the girl spoke—

'Oh! take me home; let me go back to Grayfleet!'

White took her hand softly, and spoke to her soothingly, but his gentleness only made her worse. At last he yielded to his irritation and insisted on an explanation.

Drying her eyes she sat up and looked at him, and he was startled by the white determination in her delicate face.

'Why are you not at school?' he repeated.

'Because I've left, and I'll never go back to school again.'

'Madeline!'

'It's true, and I want to go home. I won't stay here, and I won't go back to school.'

'But what has happened?'

Madeline gave a wild hysterical laugh, and her face assumed an expression of exultation.

'I struck her in the face, Mr. White, and I pulled down her hair, and when she saw I was angry, she was frightened and screamed. If I had been stronger, I

would have killed her—I would! I would!'

Completely perplexed by this enigmatical tirade, White quietly took his hat and walked off to the young ladies' seminary, which was only a few streets away. Arrived there, he found everything in commotion and the lady superintendent highly indignant.

It appeared, on explanation, that Madeline, for some reason unexplained, had, during the mid-day play hour, made a savage attack upon a young lady of sixteen, a parlour boarder excellently connected; had sprung upon her with fury, scratched her face, and had clung to her until torn away by force. The superintendent's mind was made up; Madeline must not return to the school.

'She is a very violent child. I have again and again had to rebuke her for fits of passion. I have now discovered, moreover, that her connections are not what I

should wish in members of my seminary. Miss de Castro, whom she assaulted, is a sweet girl, incapable of provocation. Her papa is in the India Office. She is niece of Sir Michael de Castro, late Governor of Chickerabad, and I cannot have her assaulted by a common child.'

White stared silently at the lady, and without a word strode back to the studio. There, with a severity unusual to him, he demanded a full explanation. He thus learned that the *fons et origo* of all the mischief was Uncle Luke's letter. By some accident it had fallen from Madeline's bosom and been picked up by Miss de Castro. That 'sweet girl' had read it through to a group of the elder pupils, doing full justice to the orthography, and mimicking, as far as she could imagine them, the living manners of the writer. In the midst of her amusement, Madeline had appeared and demanded her property, which Miss de Castro immediately thrust

behind her back, while she indulged in a series of witticisms at the expense of Madeline and all her relations, especially the country correspondent. This was enough. Almost before she herself knew it Madeline was at her throat, and in a white heat of passion. The sweet girl screamed. Madeline was torn away and thrust violently out of the school-yard gate, but not before she had recovered her uncle's letter and thrust it into her bosom. Then she had flown home.

White was greatly perplexed how to act. In his secret heart he sided with the child, and cursed the cruelty of ignorance and caste; but he nevertheless perceived that fits of passion and violence were not to be encouraged. So he frowned terribly, and read Madeline a long and stern lecture on the wickedness of giving up to wrath. She heard him out with great attention, and with her great eyes fixed pathetically on his. At the conclusion of the harangue,

she took out Uncle Luke's letter and quietly kissed it—then smiled faintly through her tears at the thought of her wrongs. It was clear that she was quite impenitent.

Madeline did not go back to school. For some months she remained at home with the De Bernys ; White, in his indolent way, postponing the question of where she was to go next.

He was a good deal occupied at this time with the adaptation of a new play which was being acted with great success at the Porte St. Martin, and as it was necessary to see the play represented by the French actors, he spent some weeks in Paris. He discovered that by carefully lopping the leading idea, making the chief female virtuous instead of vicious, altering the scenes, and turning the moral upside down, he could make the great drama pure enough for the sight of the British play-goer. His English manager approved,

sent him a small cheque on account, and begged him 'to do the trick' as quickly as possible.

At this period, therefore, Madeline was thrown more and more into the society of Mademoiselle Mathilde. That vision of loveliness found the child useful, sent her on endless errands, made of her a sort of companion in miniature, and extempore lady's maid. Madeline was only too delighted to serve and worship, and great was her joy when any of the cast-off splendour fell to her share. One evening Madame de Berny took her to the theatre, on the occasion of her daughter's 'benefit.' There was a serio-comedy in which Mathilde played the leading part, and a burlesque to follow, in which (for that occasion only, for she generally despised burlesque) she enacted a fairy prince. Madeline was entranced; the spell of the footlights came upon her, once and for ever.

That night, after they had returned

home, and the Vision had supped well on oysters and bottled stout, Madeline proffered a request which had lately become a very common one with her.

'Oh, Mamzelle, let me brush your hair!'

Mathilde took a sleepy sensuous pleasure in that part of her toilette, and would sit by the hour together under the soothing manipulation of the brush. So she let down her golden locks, and placed herself, with her eyes half closed, before the mirror, while Madeline began her task, prattling between whiles of the theatre, of all the wonders she had seen, and of the longing that would possess her until she saw them again.

'I used to feel like you once,' yawned Mathilde, 'when I was a dear little thing, with my hair growing down to my waist, and little satin shoes on my feet, and Pa used to take me to the pantomimes. Ah, dear, that's over and done. I hate the theatre.'

'You hate it, Mamzelle?'

'Yes, and sometimes I hate Pa for ever letting me go nigh to it. I suppose it all comes of Ma marrying a Frenchman; for Pa used to teach me to say those long speeches in rhyme out of the French plays, and then I got a taste for recitation. But I hate French now, and I hate the theatre. It's nothing but worry and vexation. There was only five pounds ten in the stalls to-night besides the tickets Pa and Ma sold, and the dress circle was not half full. Did you notice a dark fat man in a private box, who threw a bouquet to Miss Harlington?'

'Do you mean a gentleman with a hook nose, Mamzelle, and his fingers all over big rings?'

'Yes. Well that was Isaacs, proprietor of the "Evening Scrutator." A nasty beast, always smelling of cigars and rum-and-water. He hates me because I keep myself respectable, and he never suffers

any one of his critics to say a good word about me.'

'Who are *they*, Mamzelle?'

'The critics? Tomfools who write in the papers, and don't know good acting from bad, and if they did daren't say so. Why, they praise Miss Harlington—who played "Princess Prettypet" in the burlesque!'

'Oh, yes,' cried Madeline, in rapture. 'Her in the pink dress with the spangles and the flowers in her hair. Oh, wasn't she lovely, Mamzelle?'

Mathilde tossed her head under the brush, and flushed with virtuous contempt.

'A bandy-legged thing with a voice like a goat. Did you hear the creature sing? I wonder they don't hiss her off the stage. But the men run after her, and she's kept by an earl; and there she is every day in her victoria, driving in the Row among real ladies, while I must go down to rehearsal in the bus. Its dis-

gusting—that's what it is. Do take care, Madeline—you're brushing it all the wrong way.'

She added as an afterthought, less in real consideration for her hearer than as a parade of her own wrongs—

'Never you be an actress, child. Sweep a crossing first, or serve behind a counter, or do anything dreadful. The stage isn't fit for any decent person, and so I've told Pa and Ma a thousand times.

From this and from many other similar conversations, and from several subsequent visits to the theatre, both before and behind the scenes, Madeline began to acquire a precocious insight into some of the mysteries of life in London. She was clever and quick, and soon understood as much as was comprehensible to so pure a child. Mathilde de Berny, like many of her class, talked freely about things which might well have been nameless, and never seemed to reflect that the listener was so

young. Fortunately, Madeline's perfect innocence and simplicity, combined with her real strength of character, kept her pure from taint; but by slow degrees the glory was beginning to depart from the great world of which she knew so little.

Not at all too soon. White saw that Madeline was in danger of degeneration. He was a shrewd fellow, and understood that Mathilde de Berny, though a perfectly virtuous young woman, was not really the best companion she could have found. It irritated him too, at last, to see the child sinking into a mere appendage of the actress and general drudge of the house.

'I must get her away,' he said to himself, 'before they spoil her altogether. They neglect her and impose upon her, and teach her things she ought not to know. I don't want Fred's child to grow into a little slattern, with the education, and perhaps the moral instinct, of a ballet-girl. They make a small parasite of her, and

she goes errands ; they've even got in the habit of sending her for the beer. I'll put a stop to it at once.'

The only way of putting a stop to it was to send Madeline to a boarding-school ; and this he ultimately determined to do. He had begun to feel quite a paternal interest in her, and he was more and more struck by her physical beauty and strong natural affection.

After seeking about for some time, and studying the advertising columns of the daily newspapers, he discovered a quiet school at Merton, in Surrey, under the superintendence of a very superior French lady. Hither it was arranged that Madeline should go.

So, after a fond parting with White, Madeline repaired to the seminary at Merton.

For a long time after her departure White was melancholy.

He missed her bright face and her

loving ways; and so, in a less degree, did his companion of the studio. But White was a busy man, part of a busy world, and he had no time to be heartbroken about a little girl. Every month or so he received a formal account of her doings, signed by the superintendent, and still oftener a very effusive and loving letter from Madeline herself. She appeared to have become resigned very rapidly to the new conditions of her life; to be sanguine and full of promise; and the official notes of her educational progress were flattering in the extreme.

. . . .

At this point, our business with Madeline's childhood ceases. We take the dramatist's license, and at one leap pass over a period of several years.

The school was in connection with a similar one in Normandy, and the pupils had the advantage of being transferred, at a certain stage of their progress, and at

little additional expense, to the French establishment. The superintendent was a sensible woman, and so White told her the whole story.

It was presently decided that it would be for Madeline's advantage to go to France for a year, without seeing anything of White or any of her new friends. She was still only a very rough diamond, and needed very considerable polishing to make her approach perfection. A long period spent in pleasant discipline, and with only the most refined surroundings, was absolutely essential to her moral development. So at least thought the lady superintendent; and White agreed.

On receiving the information that she was to be again transplanted, Madeline was in high grief and dudgeon, for she had been thoroughly happy with the De Bernys, and desired no better than to become again a kind of Cinderella to the fair Mathilde.

During her residence at Merton Marmaduke White has been fairly well satisfied with his ward. Beyond complaints of certain erratic habits, and of her general disposition to act from passionate impulse, he had heard little to her detriment, much to her credit.

He had seen her from time to time, and she had spent many of her holidays at Willowtree Road.

From the tone of her letters, and from her words when they met, he gathered that she was happy. She had gained the wish of her heart; had learnt 'French and music,' as well as the other elegancies which constitute a good education.

So Madeline was sent to Normandy, with a contingent of young girls from the school at Merton.

One day, when nearly eighteen months had elapsed since their last meeting, White received a photograph from France. It represented a fair maiden, with great

wistful eyes, and a face of singular beauty.

At first he scarcely knew it; then he turned it over, and read in a bold hand-writing :—

Madeline Haslemere, taken at Rouen on her 17th birthday.

'Little Madeline!' he exclaimed. 'Why, she looks quite a woman!'

About a week after this event, Judas (now grown into a disjointed being of seventeen or eighteen) entered with a telegram. White opened it, and saw with astonishment that it was from Madame Brock, the lady superintendent of the school at Merton.

Then he read as follows :—

Please come down at once. I have had terrible news from Millefleurs. Your ward, Madeline Haslemere, has run away. I fear it is an elopement.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HAWK AND THE DOVE.

THE scene of our story changes for a time from smoky London to a lonely road close to the sea-coast of Normandy. It is the sunset of a rainy day, a fierce red light beats down on the yellow colza fields, sprinkled with great bells of crimson poppy; on the deep, wind-swept patches of yellow wheat; on the little villages embowered in foliage, each with its old-fashioned auberge and its glittering spire.

An open post-chaise, drawn by a pair of heavy horses, is flying seaward, towards the marine town of Fécamp. Side by side within it sit two figures, a very young lady, wrapped in a fur-lined silk cloak, and a tall,

haggard-looking man of thirty, with very long hair and a jet-black moustache.

Every now and again the man leans forward and urges on the driver, then, after a quick glance on the road, which winds far away behind them, he sinks back upon his seat.

They halt and change horses in a quaint little village, where old women and maidens ply their antique spinning-wheels at the cottage doors, and blue-bloused loungers puff their *sous* cigars on wooden forms before the auberge. They do not alight, but the gentleman brings the lady a tiny glass of the liqueur called 'Bénédictin,' and some wine biscuits. She sips the liqueur and breaks a biscuit, while the loungers in blue blouses look on in admiration.

The young lady is very pale, and looks so young that the loungers whisper wonderingly at each other. Now and then her lip quivers, and her eyes fill

with tears. The gentleman with her watches her anxiously, trying to anticipate every look and wish, but she scarcely looks at him—her thoughts are far away.

'How far to Fécamp?' the gentleman asks of the ostler, as he slips the *pour-boire* into his hand; and when he finds that it is still many kilomètres away, and that it is impossible to reach it in less than three or four hours, he mutters an imprecation.

There is a quick, cat-like look in his eyes, as he converses with the world at large; but when he turns to his companion the look is exchanged for one of touching humility and sweetness.

They are ready to start again, the driver is in his place, when the young lady springs up and cries in French, '*Arrêtez!*' The gentleman, who is again seated by her side, looks at her in astonishment.

'Madeline! *mon ange!*'

She answers him in English.

'It is not too late—let us turn and go back. I am sorry now I came away. Monsieur Belleisle, I *insist* on turning back.'

'*Mais non!*'

'Madame Collemache will forgive me—I will go upon my knees and ask her—Madame is a good woman. Oh, why did you ask me to do anything so foolish? Look how these people are staring! Turn back at once!'

But, at a sign from the gentleman, the driver has started off, and they are soon leaving the village at full gallop. To comfort her, Monsieur slips his hand round her waist. He is not prepared for the result, which came in the shape of a sharp slap in the face from the little gloved hand.

'How dare you? I will not be pulled about, and I will go back to Madame. If you are a gentleman you will take me back at once.'

Monsieur rubs his cheek and tries to smile, but there is an angry light in his eyes nevertheless.

'You are cruel, and I—ah, how I love you! Have you not promised to be my leetle wife? Mine own Madeline!'

He is about to embrace her again, but the look in her face deters him.

'I was angry with Madame because I thought her cruel and unjust. She made me mad, and so I listened to you. Drive me back, Monsieur, and I will like you very much. I will take all the blame upon myself—only drive me back.'

'Do not speak so,' is the reply. 'We love each other—we will be happy—ah, so happy—with one another. Madeline! my bride!'

'I have changed my mind. I will not marry you, Monsieur Belleisle!'

'*Ah ciel*, you do not mean what you say!'

'I do mean it. Why should I marry

you? I do not like you. I shall hate you soon.'

'It is too late to say that.'

'But it is true.'

'Ah, I will not beliefe it! You are triste—the journey make you triste and fatiguée—to-morrow you will smile again upon your own Auguste.'

'Pray don't talk nonsense,' answered the young lady. 'I liked you very well when you gave me my lessons, and last night in my anger, in my wickedness, I thought I would come with you, because I wished to be revenged on Madame and Mademoiselle Blanche. But now I have repented, Monsieur. I was a little fool, and I will beg their pardon. They have been very kind to me. I was ungrateful. I will return.'

All this in an impetuous stream, half soliloquy, half entreaty. In her passion and excitement the girl looks very lovely, and the Frenchman gazes at her in growing

admiration. Then a thought seems to strike him, and he looks at her slyly and smiles.

'Why are you laughing, Monsieur?' she cries.

'I was thinking, *mignonne*, how ridiculous you would look if you returned. Ah, Dieu, how they would *laugh!*'

This is a move in the right direction. The young lady cannot bear ridicule, and she frowns at the very thought of it. For some minutes she seems plunged in bitter reflection; then she speaks again.

'No, I am not afraid,' she cries; 'I do not fear any but Madame, and when I have apologised she will take my part. Oh, why did I come with you? why did I think of running away?'

'Because you love me, *mon ange!*'

'Love you, Monsieur Belleisle? I like you better than Herr Bunsen, because he is always cross and stupid and you are good-tempered. And I thought you hand-

some. Well, I did not know my mind. I will not marry you—the thought is ridiculous. You are thirty years old, and I do not like Frenchmen.'

Despite her protestations, the post-chaise still continues its wild career. It is dark at last, and the darkness is deepened by long avenues of spectral fir trees which line the road on either side. A diligence passes swiftly by, with murmur of voices and jingling of bells.

As night comes on the girl grows frightened, shrinks away from her companion, and sobs bitterly. He tries to comfort her with embraces and loving words, but she avoids his touch, and rejects all his consolations.

If there were enough light to show his face, it would reveal an aspect almost Mephistophelean in its cat-like expression. His long fingers close and unclose nervously; he would like to use force, but he lacks the courage.

At last he wins her to comparative quiescence by proving to her that return is impossible before the morrow, and by promising that when the morrow comes he will, if she still wishes it, see her safely back to school. With this poor comfort she is obliged to be content; for the house she left at daybreak lies thirty miles behind, and it would be useless to turn thither now.

Presently the lights of a town gleam before them, and, after rattling through some dark suburbs, they draw up before the threshold of an inn—the *Lion d'Or*. It is a large dreary place, with little or no custom. A ghostly waiter shows them to a great *salle à manger*, which is totally deserted.

'While dinner is preparing, perhaps Madame would like to make her toilette?'

He lays emphasis on the 'Madame;' and then demands, respectfully, how many chambers will be required?

Madeline does not hear, but her companion explains that two chambers will be wanted—one for the young lady, one for himself. The waiter bows and withdraws. An elderly chambermaid soon appears, and shows Madeline up to a great bedroom, grim and lonely as an empty barn, with one little chilly bed in the corner. There are no curtains to the window, and the moonlight is creeping in with a ghastly gleam.

Left alone, Madeline resigns herself to remorse and despair, and sobs as if her heart would break. An hour passes thus. Then the chambermaid appears with the intimation that Monsieur is waiting dinner, and is impatient. After a moment's hesitation Madeline descends.

They are alone in the *salle à manger*, and the first course is served, when there enters a muscular young man in a shooting coat, a shirt very loose about the collar, and a loose necktie. 'Englishman' is

written in every lineament of his brown, sun-tanned countenance. In the manner of many of his nation, he scowls at his fellow-guests, and then, without a word, falls upon the soup.

Dish after dish goes from Madeline untasted. She breaks a little bread, that is all, and drinks a little Bordeaux and water. Her face is white as death, and all the tremendousness of the situation is full upon her.

Monsieur Belleisle, for his part, feeds ravenously, and drinks more than one bottle of light wine. He is agitated, but preserves his composure. In his heart he curses the unwelcome third party present; he burns for a *tête-à-tête.*

Third party proceeds leisurely with his dinner, only addressing the waiter in monosyllables. He is a man of thirty, of splendid physique and perfect health. He seems to see and hear nothing, but all the time his eyes and ears are wide open.

He starts when the young lady—whom he has been watching quietly—speaks in the English tongue.

'The chambermaid says there is a train from this place to Rouen. It leaves at daybreak, Monsieur Belleisle.'

'We will talk of that to-morrow,' murmurs the Frenchman, with his mouth full.

'That will be too late. I will leave by the first train, and get a cab from Rouen to Millefleurs. I will explain all—they may punish me as they please—I do not care.'

'*Diable*, and what will then become of me?'

'I don't know—I suppose you will lose your situation, but you will soon get another.'

Monsieur sinks his voice and whispers—

'Another *wife*, mignonne? Ah, non! If you abandon me I shall blow out my brains;' then, still in a low voice, inaudible to the other person in the room, he con-

tinues, 'But you are mad, my Madeline, to think of going back. Hélas, it is too late; you *must* marry me *now*, or do you know what they will say? They will say that your character is gone, that you are *méchante*, and then no one will marry you to be put to shame. Yes, it is too late. You should have thought of this before to-morrow. You must become Madame my wife, or you will not be able to face the world.'

If the speaker were an individual of any insight, or the least sensitiveness, he would get uncomfortable under the calm unconscious wonder of the eyes which regard him. His threat, for his words amount to a threat, is completely vain. The girl looks at him quietly, and for some minutes makes no reply whatever.

Encouraged by this silence, he pours out a low stream of endearing epithets, cursing all the time the third party whose

presence compels him to sink his voice to a whisper.

At that juncture, however, the third party rises, and walks quietly from the room. Monsieur Belleisle jumps up, closes the door, and turns to Madeline with extended arms, repeating in a louder voice his volley of endearments.

'Do not talk nonsense, Monsieur,' is the girl's reply. 'I am not an angel; I am more like a devil, Mademoiselle Collemache has often said. Do not come near me—I will not be embraced. I tell you I will not marry you. Even if I liked you well enough, and I don't, it would be too absurd.'

'Absurd!' echoed the Frenchman, with indignation.

'Yes. I am a great deal too young. It was wicked of you, Monsieur, to tempt me—to come upon me when I was in a passion, and persuade me to elope.'

'But I love you—ah Dieu, how much!'

'Don't speak of it, Monsieur. Let me go back to Madame in peace, and implore her forgiveness—I will do so—on my knees if she wishes it. I deserve whipping—no punishment is too bad for me—I am so wicked.'

'Madeline,' says the Frenchman, yielding at last to the growing fury within him, 'let us finish this folly. I will not lose you so—no, a hundred times no. I tell you there is no escape—you will marry me to-morrow; you will, you must. If you do not, if you refuse, take care.'

And his eyes roll with a look of significance, which she does not understand.

'Take care of what, Monsieur?'

'Of the world—of *me*. *Voilà!* If you do not marry me, you will never marry another man! You do not know me—I am desperate. I will follow you up and down the world—I will say such things, ah, Dieu, what will I not say?—until at

last you go upon your bended knees and *beg* me to make you my wife.'

As he speaks his face is livid with fury, and he seems positively transformed. The girl looks at him in supreme astonishment and growing dislike; then she gives a little forced laugh.

'Do not lose your temper, Monsieur. One would think you were giving a French lesson to one of the little girls.'

'I will give you such a lesson,' he exclaims, 'as you will remember. I am not a common man, and I will not be so befooled—no, no! You treat all love as nothing—at my devotion you laugh—you are cruel, but *I* can be cruel too.—Ah, now, I do not mean that! I love you too well. You promised to marry me, and you will marry me, *n'est-ce pas*, my Madeline?'

He starts and tries to compose his features, for that moment the obnoxious third party re-enters the room, and, taking

a chair, proceeds, with an air of great carelessness, to read a journal.

After an awkward suspense of some minutes, Belleisle, in his turn, leaves the apartment, not without glancing significantly at the stranger, and expressively putting his finger to his lips to enjoin silence.

Scarcely has he vanished when the third party rises, looks at Madeline, and, walking quietly over to her, says in English—

'Pardon me, but is that gentleman your husband?'

CHAPTER XII.

CAGED.

THUS abruptly interrogated, Madeline goes red as crimson, and trembles violently. Then by a mighty effort she recovers herself, conquers the violent trembling of her hands, and raises her head.

He repeats the question; whereupon Madeline turns her head coldly away.

The movement is abrupt enough to send her *vis-à-vis* straight from the room, but, curiously enough, he lingers. Madeline does not look at him, but she feels that he is examining her—his eyes search her face, her figure, her hands. With an impulsive movement she turns slightly, interlaces her fingers, so as to hide from his searching

gaze the third finger of her left hand; then gives one quick glance at his face.

'I do not know you, monsieur!'

'No, *Madame.*' He lays unusual stress upon the title. 'But the fact of your having used the English language must pass as my excuse for having addressed you at all. Can I be of any service to you?'

He asks the question slowly, but without a moment's hesitation Madeline replies—

'No, no.'

The answer, which is more like a pitiful appeal than a cold dismissal, holds the man to his place.

'I have arranged to leave here by the night train,' he says; 'but if I can be of the very slightest assistance to you, pray do not hesitate to say so. If you wish it, I will remain at hand!'

Again Madeline's cheeks burn with a humiliating sense of shame. Perhaps

that is the reason she carries her head so haughtily and infuses such a harshness into the tone of her voice.

'There is no need for you to stay; you cannot be of any use to me; but I thank you for the offer, sir. Good-night.'

And with a bow she brings the interview to a decided close, and walks to the other end of the room. For a moment or two the Englishman lingers. Although he stands at a distance, and with his face turned another way, Madeline can feel that he is watching her. At last, with a cold 'Good-night, Madame,' he leaves the room.

She has turned to answer his 'Good-night,' and now her eyes are fixed upon the door. The flush upon her cheek burns more brightly than ever, and her hands have begun to tremble again; she bites her quivering lip and walks impetuously up and down the room.

'I treated him shockingly,' she says

to herself, 'but what else could I do? Humiliate myself before him—confess that I had run away from school, and that now, like a naughty child, I wanted to be punished and then forgiven? If he had been an old man I might have done so. If he had been the least homely and comfortable-looking I might have done so —but he was so handsome and so proud-looking—and so young.'

Presently she adds:—

'I wonder what M'sieur Belleisle is doing? Perhaps I had better ring for the waiter, and make arrangements for leaving by the morning train.'

She crosses the room, lays her hand upon the bell, is about to ring, when Monsieur Belleisle, who has noiselessly entered the room, quietly takes her hand.

At the first touch of his cold fingers Madeline's face again flushes crimson, and she draws her hand away.

Madeline cannot see his face—his head

is hung too much forward, but his body bends in all humility before her.

'My Madeline is cruel,' he says in a strangely insinuating tone, 'but I confess to myself that she is right. I confess I have been to blame, but I am an honourable man, and I will make all amends.'

'By marrying me, I suppose you mean, M'sieur?'

The Frenchman smiles.

'That is what I would wish to do, but since it is not *your* wish, I will talk about it no more. I will do what you desire, Mam'selle!'

'You know what I wish. It is to return to Madame Collemache.'

The Frenchman shrugs his shoulders and spreads out both his hands.

'Even so,' he says; 'but you know, Mam'selle, you cannot leave till daybreak, for you have troubled yourself to enquire. Well, in order to screen yourself from *scandal*'—he lays peculiar stress on the

word—'I will introduce you to a lady who I know will be philanthropist enough to give you the shelter of her presence to-night, and take you back to Madame Collemache on the morrow.'

His manner is obsequious—far too obsequious to be genuine—but this Madeline does not observe. She only feels a soft sense of relief steal over her, and in her gratitude she impulsively takes the Frenchman's hand.

'You are too good, M'sieur,' she says, 'and I shall never rest until I have repaid you. I will intercede with Madame Collemache—I will write to Mr. White, my guardian—I will get you your reward!'

The Frenchman bows still lower.

'My Madeline will not trouble herself so much on my account,' he says. 'I have won a leetle of Madeline's esteem—and so I have my reward. And now I have a leetle favour to ask for in return.'

Madeline's face falls, and though he

does not appear to be looking at her he notices it in a moment.

'Do not be afraid,' he continues, reassuringly, but keeping at a respectful distance from her. 'My request is for your good. It is this—that you promise me to remain quietly here for an hour or two; say nothing to anyone, and not to make arrangements about the journey to-morrow: all that shall be done for you. At the end of two hours, say, I will return. I will bring with me the respectable lady I have mentioned—and then, with my Madeline's permission, I will make my adieux.'

'Make your adieux?—ah, M'sieur, I am so sorry for you——'

'Do not talk of me! I shall find another appointment. You will give the promise which I ask of you?'

'Yes.'

He takes her hand, bends over it, and kisses it—and leaves the girl alone.

For a time Madeline stands quite still, stupefied by the very intensity of her relief. She rests her elbow on the mantelpiece, drops her cheeks upon her hands, and fixes her eyes upon the windows, as if to watch the slowly gathering gloom. She feels no self-pity; on the events which will probably transpire on the morrow her imagination refuses to dwell; she can think only of M'sieur Belleisle—of his goodness, his self-sacrifice, his devotion. During the whole time of their acquaintance Madeline has never thought so highly of her tutor as she does at this moment—when she is preparing, as she thinks, to plunge him into ruin.

Her meditations having reached this point are interrupted. The door of the *salle à manger* opens, and the Englishman re-enters the room. He is dressed for travelling; he looks around as if searching for something, then he paused before the girl.

'I am just on the point of starting,' he says abruptly; and Madeline, after puzzling her brain for a suitable reply, says—

'It is a fine night for travelling—I wish you a pleasant journey, M'sieur.'

He pauses, and for a moment there is blank silence; then he returned to the old question—

'You are sure,' he says, 'quite sure, that I can do nothing for you?'

And Madeline, feeling that since her last interview with Monsieur Belleisle her mantle of shame has fallen from her, gives such a decided negative that her companion goes.

How dark it is growing! and, with the coming on of night, how the girl's spirits sink! She lights the gas, and looks at her watch. Half an hour only has passed since Monsieur Belleisle left her; some time must yet elapse before he returns. Meanwhile, what can she do to make the time hang less heavily on her hands? .She

resolves to write letters, and, having got the waiter to supply her with pens, ink, and paper, sits down to concoct an epistle to Mr. White.

Madeline is impulsive, and the impulse of gratitude is just now strongly upon her. Her letter to White, after giving a short account of her elopement, is filled with the most pronounced eulogiums upon Monsieur Belleisle—his goodness, his self-sacrifice—and ends by asking White if he cannot make some reparation to the man. Her letter to Madame Collemache is less gushing, but more to the point. In it she promises to return on the morrow, implores Madame's forgiveness, and tells her all. Having written the letters, she hands them to the waiter to be posted forthwith. Her letter to Madame Collemache will arrive in the morning, a few hours before the return of the unlucky criminal herself. The thought of this comforts the girl; it will pave the way for the coming interview,

and make it less trying, she thinks. When it occurs to her for a moment that Madame Collemache may refuse to have any interview at all, she reflects that the lady whom Monsieur Belleisle, with an amount of delicate consideration she had certainly never given him credit for, has volunteered to introduce, will be a sufficient guarantee of her conduct, and make all right again.

Again Madeline's meditations are interrupted; this time by a carriage, which, after dashing rapidly along the street, stops suddenly before the door of the inn. Madeline runs to the window, and is just in time to see, by the flickering light of the street lamps, a figure, quietly dressed in black, descending from the *voiture* and entering the door of the inn. The arrival seems to have caused a sensation; sounds of voices come from below; steps come steadily up the stairs; then the door of the *salle à manger* opens, and the new arrivals enter the room.

One is Monsieur Belleisle, the other a lady clad in heavy widow's mourning, who leans rather heavily on his arm.

At the first glance the lady appears to be young—her step is elastic, her figure slight; but when she comes right into the room, and stands beneath the glare of the gaslight, one can see at a glance that her age must be nearly sixty.

Her hair, which is brushed very smooth beneath her widow's bonnet, is white as snow, and her whole face bears the unmistakable stamp of care. Madeline is glad; the widow's mourning, the white hair and wrinkled face, seem to shed all over her the halo of respectability. With a childish faith in the sex of the new-comer, she steps forward impulsively, holding out her hand.

Monsieur introduces the lady as his 'very good friend, Madame de Fontenay;' then after a word or two, he takes

a respectful farewell of Madeline and goes. He will not even remain in the same hotel which holds the girl that night, so careful is he of her good name—but five minutes after he has left the *salle à manger*, Madeline, who is looking from the window, sees him enter the post-chaise lately occupied by Madame de Fontenay, and drive rapidly from the door.

Madeline, stricken with remorse, has asked his plans, but he has told her nothing. When she hinted that she might wish to communicate with him, he replied that any communication for him can be sent through Madame de Fontenay.

And now, while the carriage which contains Monsieur Belleisle is rolling away through the thickening darkness, Madeline turns to discuss her tutor with her new friend. She has waxed eloquent in her praise of him, and is just in the middle of a fresh eulogium, when the waiter brings in the supper, and Madame de Fontenay

retires to prepare for the meal. When she returns, divested of her bonnet and her cloak, and takes her seat at the head of the table, she says—

'When I ordered supper, ma chère Mam'selle Hazelmere, I took the liberty of ordering it for two, for look you, ever since the days of my childhood I could never bear to eat alone. You will join me? Non? Well, you will at least break a biscuit and drink with me a glass of wine.'

Whereupon Madeline, who has turned from the supper, takes her seat at the table to crumble her biscuit and sip the wine which Madame de Fontenay has poured; but at this juncture Madeline grows thoughtful, and Madame de Fontenay, who has hitherto been rather reticent, grows very talkative indeed, sips her wine with a relish, disposes of the various courses, pausing now and again to glance with piercing eyes at the girl.

Supper being over, Madame rises and slips her hand through Madeline's arm.

'Come to the window, Mademoiselle,' she says, 'and take a breath of air while the waiter prepares the coffee. But first—see, you have not finished your wine.'

She lifts the glass, which still holds a little wine, and offers it to Madeline, but the girl, with a deprecating movement, turns away.

'I cannot take any more of that wine, Madame,' she says; 'it is very strong; I think it has made me feel quite stupid.'

Madame de Fontenay gives a little laugh, and holding her hand still tighter on her companion's arm, and leading her to a seat in the window, places herself by her side.

'Ah, my child,' she says, 'it is not the effect of the wine; it is the result of the trouble, the excitement, the fatigue, through which you have passed this day. You will

get to bed, and rise in the morning refreshed for your journey back.'

Madeline assents. She sits in the window allowing the widow to stroke her feverishly-burning hand; but as that strange drowsiness oppresses her more and more, she goes to bed and falls into a heavy slumber.

When she awakens it is broad day; a figure dressed in black is bending above her, holding a tray. Madeline rubs her eyes—then, looking through a mist which seems to obscure her sight, she recognises the pale, bloodless features of Madame de Fontenay; she looks round the room, everything is misted; she rises in bed, and finds she can scarcely sit up. Her temples throb, her head burns—she seems to have been seized with fever.

Then in one flash the reality of her situation comes upon her, and she gazes at the window with wild frightened eyes.

'The morning train to Rouen is gone?' she asks.

Madame de Fontenay bends above her with a kind, reassuring smile. She has placed the tray on a table which she has drawn up beside the bed; and now she presses her cold white hands to Madeline's throbbing brow. As she does so a strange light comes into her eyes, a curious smile contracts her mouth; but her voice is quite melodious when she speaks again.

'The morning train is gone—yes, that is so,' she says. 'I came and looked at you half an hour before the train started, and I did not wake you, since I saw you were not fit to travel. You are sickening for an illness, and I must remove you carefully. I have ordered a carriage to be at the door in half an hour. You will take this breakfast which I have brought to you, and dress yourself—*après*, we will start for Rouen.'

Madeline assents; half an hour later she is seated in a close carriage, resting

her throbbing head on Madame de Fontenay's shoulder.

'How your brow burns, my dear child,' says Madame de Fontenay, drawing off one of her gloves, and laying her cool fingers on the throbbing temples of the girl; then she produces a small gold-mounted vinaigrette and offers it to the girl.

'Smell this occasionally, and it will relieve the feverish condition—above all, remain tranquil, and close your eyes.'

The latter part of this advice is quite unnecessary; although Madeline's head is burning more feverishly than ever, although her temples continue to throb, her lips feel parched and dry—she feels gradually stealing over her a strange sense of languor, which compels her to shut her eyes and lean more heavily upon her companion.

The carriage, which is drawn by two horses, proceeds quickly on its way. Madame de Fontenay thrusts her head

and shoulders out of the carriage window to give some directions to the coachman. What she says Madeline does not know. She can only hear a confused murmur of voices, which seem to come to her through the vapours of a dream. She hears the murmurs, she feels the lady reseat herself, then she knows that the carriage is going even faster than before; and she again relapses into a dim state of stupor.

When next she opens her eyes the carriage has stopped, and Madame de Fontenay, with some assistance, is helping her to alight. When she stands erect in the open air her head begins to swim; she reels, and is caught in somebody's arms. She gazes vacantly about her, and as she does so she grows still more confused. She is at a railway station, and although her senses are very much dulled she possesses reason enough to know she has never been there before. She is about to speak, when Madame de Fontenay, put-

ting an arm affectionately around her, half leads, half pushes her forward; then she is hurriedly thrust into a first-class carriage, the doors are banged to, and the train moves off. As it does so, she makes a strong effort to shake off the dreamy stupor which seems to be paralysing her whole body—she looks around the carriage. Besides herself, the only other occupant of the compartment is Madame de Fontenay, who, bending over a small wicker basket, is busily engaged in producing eatables and a little wine. There is a light burning in the carriage roof, and when Madeline looks out of the carriage window she is amazed to find that day is fast fading into night.

What a strange country they are passing through! She racks her brain, trying to remember if she has ever seen it before; but the more she tries to collect her thoughts, the more confused and clouded they become.

A light touch from her companion rouses her from her reverie; she looks round; Madame de Fontenay is offering her a sandwich—she takes it; she is growing sick and faint for want of food.

'Where are we?' asks Madeline; but it is evident that Madame de Fontenay does not hear. She sits composedly in one corner, eats some sandwiches, and sips some wine. Presently she rises, turns her back upon her companion for a moment, then approaching her, offers her a little wine. Madeline turns aside her head, and holds up her hands as if to push the glass away. She has grown to detest the wine, for whenever she sips it she seems to feel that strange drowsiness increase; but Madame de Fontenay, who is not quite so yielding as she has been heretofore, takes the girl's nerveless hands in her own, and, holding the glass to her bloodless lips, forces her to drink.

The train speeds on, the hours go by

wearily and slowly, and with the passing of every hour the darkness deepens. Madeline, feeling utterly prostrated and paralysed, sits helpless in her corner of the carriage, and Madame de Fontenay sleeps. Her sleep is evidently of the lightest, for whenever the train stops she starts to her feet, rushes to the door and keeps her stand there, while sounds of feet rise and die upon the platform, and the train moves on again. Madeline tries to rise, but her strength fails her; she tries to speak—the words die upon her lips in a faint inarticulate sound—something catches her breath and parches her tongue. Thus the night passes.

Dawn breaks, and almost with the first streak of daybreak the train comes to a stand again, and Madeline is assisted out. Again she tries to speak, but her low faint murmurs are lost amidst the bustle, the confusion, the loud cries of the railway officials. She is hurried through the

crowd into a carriage, and before she can collect her wandering senses to protest she is again being whirled rapidly onward. A drive of some minutes; then the carriage passes through a narrow street and stops before a door. Madeline is taken from the carriage, conducted up a flight of stone steps into a finely furnished room.

A man is standing before her. At the sight of his face her dulled senses seem suddenly to brighten. She utters two words, his name—

'Monsieur Belleisle!'

The Frenchman bows, smiles, and extends both his hands towards her.

'Madeline,' he says, 'welcome, *mon ange!*'

With a cry Madeline shrinks back, her soul sickens, her dim wandering eyes begin to dilate with fear. She presses both her hands to her throbbing temples, and stares at the Frenchman again.

'Why are *you* here, M'sieur?' she says

hurriedly; 'what has been done to me—where am I?'

The Frenchman bows again.

'They have brought you to me, *mon ange*,' he says. 'You are in the house of my very good friend, Madame de Fontenay.'

There is something in his face which causes Madeline to shrink back with horror; then, with a low cry, she covers her face with her hands and falls in a swoon upon the floor.

CHAPTER XIII.

MADELINE AWAKES FROM HER DREAM.

THAT very day, either with or without her consent, Madeline Hazlemere was made Madeline Belleisle; at least, a certain form of marriage was gone through, in the presence of Madame de Fontenay and several strangers, and before a person in the habit of a priest. Madeline had now no power to resist, for the influence of some strange opiate was upon her—dulling all her senses, and making the first few days of her married life pass in a sort of dream.

They travelled for a couple of days; then paused, and lived for a week or so in some quaint little village by the sea. Where it was Madeline did not know; she had not

even energy enough to enquire; unresisting, uncomplaining, she was led about like a lamb going to the slaughter. In the morning she walked along the sands by the Frenchman's side, and dreamily watched the fashionable Parisian bathers disporting themselves in the waves; then she returned home to spend the rest of the day with Madame de Fontenay (who, for some mysterious reason, had never once left the married pair), while Monsieur Belleisle betook himself to the café to spend his evenings in his own favourite way.

It could not be expected that the days would continue to glide thus smoothly along; nevertheless the peace was broken rather sooner than one would have anticipated. One morning, as Madeline rose from the breakfast table and put on her hat for a stroll along the sands, her husband laid his hand upon her arm and drew her into her seat again.

'Madeline, *mon amie*,' he said in his

blandest tone, 'I wish to arrange with you concerning our domestic life. I should have wished the first advance to come from you; but since that cannot be, since you take so little interest in our *ménage* as to be indifferent to it, it is time for me to speak.'

The girl sat quietly where she had been placed, and fixed her eyes sadly upon the Frenchman. He had used her like a villain, but for the moment the part which he had played was partially or entirely forgotten. She thought only of the man who had first awakened romance within her. Had Monsieur Belleisle spoken kindly, had he infused into his tone and words one-half the tenderness which at one time he had at his command, she might have thrown herself into his arms, with tears of tenderness and sorrow; but his manner chilled her, and her rising tears were checked by the presence of Madame de Fontenay, who sat in the room quietly watching and waiting.

Madeline remained silent; so the Frenchman spoke again—

'How do you suppose,' said he, 'that we are to live, my dear?'

Still Madeline was dumb—what could he mean by asking her such a question?

'You will write,' continued Monsieur Belleisle, 'write at once, for enough time has been wasted, to your English guardian —M'sieur White, I think you have called him—and ask him to send you two hundred pounds.'

Still Madeline stared in silence. She was not thinking of the Frenchman now. All her present surroundings faded away, and she saw only the pleasant little studio in St. John's Wood, with the dearly-beloved figure of White standing amidst his brushes, canvas, and paints. But he was not looking genially about him, as she had so often seen him do; his eyes were fixed with a look of sad reproach upon the painted face of a gipsy-like girl of ten,

and his voice cried out with a ring of terrible sorrow—

'Madeline—my little Madeline!'

The girl saw and heard, and in her anguish she dropped her face in her hands and burst into a passionate flood of tears.

They were the first tears she had shed since her marriage. The storm had been long in bursting; but now its violence was intense. For a time she remained utterly prostrated by her sorrow; when she raised her head she saw that the Frenchman was calmly looking on.

'Is it over?' he asked.

Madeline did not answer him; she stifled her sobs, dried her eyes, and walked over to the window. The Frenchman followed her with his eyes.

'You are longing for your morning walk, my wife,' he said; '*eh bien*, write the letter and you shall go.'

'I cannot write the letter, M'sieur Belleisle.'

'Then give me the address of M'sieur White, and I will do so for you, *mon amie*.'

'If your only object in writing is to get money,' remarked Madeline quietly, 'you may save yourself the trouble, M'sieur —I do not think Mr. White has two hundred pounds in the whole world.'

'What do you mean?'

'Just what I say, M'sieur.'

'That M'sieur White is a poor man?'

'Very, very poor——'

'And yet he sent you to the pension of Madame Collemache, and you spread the report in Millefleurs that your English guardian was a great artist and a rich man.'

'I am sure I did not spread any such report. Mr. White pinched himself to pay for my schooling, and I have repaid him by —by——'

She paused, for Belleisle suddenly interposed with an exclamation so brutal, so

coarse and savage, that she stared at him in a new terror.

The outburst over, he sank into a chair, looking positively livid. What could Madeline say or do? She did not know. She stood staring stupidly at the Frenchman until he spoke again. He rose and came towards her, hissing his words through his teeth.

'If M'sieur White has no money, if you have no money, why then did you run away from your school and marry *me*?'

'I ran away from school because I was a foolish, ungrateful, headstrong girl, M'sieur, and I married you because you used cowardly, cruel means and forced me to do so!'

The Frenchman laughed, stretching his long thin mouth from ear to ear.

'I force you to marry me, and make you a martyr, I suppose?—that is very good. But hear the truth from me, Madame—and unless you are careful, all the world

shall know it too. I marry you simply out of pity. I am seduced by you to carry you off from school, and then, out of pity for you, I marry you and save you; yes, I sacrifice myself by taking a wife whose fame is gone—and then, when I look for a little help from you, you say "I give you none——"'

He ended with an expletive which made the girl's cheek burn with shame, and brought her trembling to her feet, with wrathful flame in her great blue eyes. For a moment he shrank before her.

'Do not try grand airs with *me*, Madame—you had better think how you are to live!——' and, with another oath, he hurriedly left the room.

All this while Madame Fontenay had kept her seat; but though her body had been inactive, her tongue silent, her eyes had done enough for all.

During the whole of the preceding interview they had been fixed with calm, cold

scrutiny on Madeline's face. She had noted every flush on her cheek, every curve of the lip, every look that was shot from the tearful eyes; finally, her cold grey orbs were fixed more steadily than ever upon the girl as she stood watching the door which had just been closed upon the enraged husband.

'Mon Dieu!' mentally exclaimed Madame de Fontenay, 'the girl is superb, is magnificent—a face like that should be fortune enough for any man!'

She rose from her seat and went over to Madeline.

'My poor child,' she said, 'this is your first quarrel, let us hope it will be your last. Emile Belleisle is a fool and a brute this morning—but he is not always so. Do not grieve, *ma chère*, or your good looks will leave you. I will reprove him for his insolence, and he—well, he shall make amends!' and she followed her accomplice, leaving Madeline alone.

For a time the girl stood, moveless, speechless, comprehending only in a dull, stupefied manner, the reality of all that had passed. Her eyes were tearless, her lips firmly set together, but her hands were trembling and cold as death. She seemed to see the Frenchman's face before her, she seemed to hear his words; then again there came to her the pitiful refrain from the man whose heart she feared to have broken—

'Madeline—my little Madeline!'

Again she sank down, crying—ah, what a relief she found in those tears! When they subsided her brain began to work, and she wondered what she must do.

Up to that moment she had sometimes pitied Monsieur Belleisle, if she could not love him. But that was all over; he had slain her pity, and he had not awakened affection. She knew now why the man wooed her, carried her off from school, and

by force married her—he fancied her a rich heiress, a girl who would enable him to renounce his slavery of teaching and live in luxury all his days. Had this indeed been the case, Belleisle would have made a tolerably quiet husband; the sudden darkening of his day dreams had turned him into a devil.

Again Madeline thought 'What shall I do?' but the answer would not shape itself. The idea of writing to White repelled her, for she remembered the letter which she had sent to him little more than three weeks before—a letter overflowing with eulogiums upon Monsieur Belleisle. She could not write yet — rather let White think her dead than alive to cause him further sorrow. She had made her own bed; come what may, she would lie on it alone.

So she sat, half crying, listening in a vague dreamy way to the traffic in the village street, when the room door sud-

denly opened, and Monsieur Belleisle returned. At his entrance she raised her head; at the sight of her tormentor she dropped it again, and coldly turned away. He did not approach her — he walked about the room for some minutes; then he sat, and there was silence. How still the room was! Madeline could hear the beating of her heart; her breath came fast and thick: her hands were growing clammily cold; anger, self-pity, resentment, were struggling in her breast, but her quivering lips would not open.

She looked round the room. There sat the Frenchman in his easy chair, with his eyes fixed gloomily upon the empty hearth. She rose to leave the room; in a moment the man sprang forward and stood in humiliation before her.

'Madeline, my wife—will you forgive me?'

The girl looked at him in blank

amazement. She could not answer him, and he continued—

'I am a passionate man — I have an uncontrollable temper, but I am not slow to say I am wrong—forgive me, my Madeline, I have wronged you.'

As he spoke he stretched forth both his hands, but she instinctively shrank away. It was well that she could not see the expression of his face as she did so. He bowed before her, and spoke again.

'*Eh bien,*' he said softly—so softly, so meltingly, she could hardly bring herself to believe it to be the same man who had insulted her a little before. '*Eh bien,* I deserve that you should shrink from me, but now I will make amends for my brutal conduct, and you shall try to forget, *chérie.*'

If Madeline had been herself she might have remembered that it was in this very guise of humility that Monsieur Belleisle came to her when he had deter-

mined upon doing her the greatest wrong which she had ever received in her life; but she was a mere child, and did not remember; the agonising hours spent in the hôtel at Fécamp were for the moment forgotten, and the Frenchman spoke on.

Ah, yes, his offence had been great; but he determined to make full reparation. He admitted that he was sorry to find that he had wed a penniless wife, but his sorrow was gone, his anger overcome; he declared now that his wife possessed attributes which money could not buy, and the want of money, save that it might deprive *her* of certain luxuries, troubled him not at all. This, then, was his purposed reparation, that Madeline should go to her room and spend the day in resting; that, subsequently, she should array herself in evening costume and accompany her Emile to a pleasant dinner, and go to a place of entertainment afterwards.

Poor Madeline looked at the man in

stupefied amazement. Whether or not he was straightforward and honest she could not tell, nor did she pause to inquire; she gave a trembling consent to all his wishes, and passed alone up to her room.

How quiet it was there! What a blessed relief from the presence of her tormentor. She poured some eau de Cologne on her forehead, threw herself on the cool white bed, and closed her aching eyes. How long she lay thus she did not know; the next thing she was conscious of was a knock at the door—then a maid entered, bearing some biscuits and a glass of wine. She informed Madeline that Monsieur had sent this refreshment to Madame, as he feared that the long day's fast would make her faint for the evening; she bore also, from Monsieur, a small three-cornered note, which Madeline laid aside until the girl had quitted the room, when she proceeded to acquaint herself with the contents.

My own little wife—my beautiful Madeline [thus wrote Monsieur Belleisle, in his own language], if you wish to please me—although I am not worthy your forbearance—still, sweet one, if you can forgive me, and will try to please me, you will make yourself look to-night divinely fair. There are many fair faces in this place—many will meet us to-night, but I wish my wife to be without a rival in the loveliness which is hers ! Your own

ÉMILE.

Madeline read the letter twice, crumpled it in her hand, and threw it aside. She drank the wine which had been sent to her, and ate a biscuit; then, feeling somewhat refreshed and a good deal clearer in the head, she reviewed in her mind the exact state of affairs.

Her first impulse that morning had been to leave her husband, to travel back to England and throw herself on the compassion of Mr. White. She knew that he would forgive her, kiss her, cry over her, and, looking a little saddened perhaps, take her to his hearth, as he had once done before. But now her common sense

told her that a *husband* could not be disposed of so readily. It was quite evident to her that Monsieur Belleisle, despite his violent words in the morning, did not wish to resign the bride he had taken so much trouble to win. If she were to return to her home, he might seek her out, and force her to return to him—or if she hid herself, he would be quite capable in his anger of making public such a story as would shame her for ever. The affair would be raked up for public comment, and the woman would be martyred, the man made a hero—as usual. Mrs. Grundy would hold up her hands in horror at the idea of a girl, still in her teens, forcing her music-master to run away with her.

Yes, the case would always stand so, for Madeline could not even urge in palliation of her act of desertion the fact of cruelty. Belleisle had spoken harshly, to be sure, but then how many husbands

often did the same, and how few of them had the good taste to make so humiliating an apology? Perhaps after all he loved her in his own peculiar fashion, and if he was willing to atone, why the best thing she could do was to meet him half way, and, if she could not be happy, to try at least and be content.

She looked at her watch; five o'clock —How quickly, and yet how wearily, the day had gone by! How white, how haggard, and old she looked! And he wanted her to eclipse the Parisian ladies who had come down to revive their beauty by the sea. She did not know that she had already done so, that during her daily walks on the sea-shore she had several times been pointed out as 'the beautiful Mademoiselle Anglaise,' whose sad eyes had unconsciously touched many hearts, and whose story many were guessing at, but no one knew.

At last she shook off her apathy, and tried to forget her sorrow. If she must appear in public she would not disgrace herself or her nation. She gave no thought to Monsieur Belleisle, but she rubbed her pale cheeks until the roses came, and then threw open the doors of her wardrobe to select a dress for that evening's wear.

'Select a dress!' how farcical it seemed. Belleisle had spoken truly when he said that he had wed a beggar. The only dress which was at all fit for her to wear was one which had been presented to her by himself some two days after their marriage — a dress of black silk, very youthful in cut, displaying very freely her throat, neck, shoulders, and arms, and fastening in at the waist with an amber girdle. A dress Greek in design, French in the arrangement of colours, and looking most bewitching when draped about the figure of the sad-eyed English girl; whose arms were so round and white, whose

shoulders so graceful and so fair, and whose whole appearance was pretty enough to subdue the most inveterate woman-hater in the world.

Arrayed in her simple dress the child stood before the mirror well pleased with herself.

'I should like dear, kind, good Mr. White to see me now,' she said to herself. 'I should like just now to run into the dear old studio in St. John's Wood, without letting Timothy announce me, as he did once before, and throw my arms round my dear old guardian's neck.'

A knock came to the door.

'Madeline, *mon amie*, forgive me for interrupting you,' said Madame de Fontenay, advancing slowly into the room; 'I knocked twice and you did not answer me, so I thought you must be sleeping.'

Madeline bit her lip, pretended to arrange some stray locks of her hair, but said nothing.

'*Ma foi*,' continued the widow, 'but you look charming; add this diamond and your toilette will be complete.'

As Madeline turned to face the widow, she started on seeing that she too wore evening dress.

Madame de Fontenay looked more motherly, more thoroughly saddened with respectability, than ever she had been before. She wore a dress of heavy widow's mourning—composed of silk, crape, and jet; a widow's cap, composed of three pretty folds, crowned her wavy masses of glittering grey hair.

'Do you go with us to-night, Madame?'

'Emile has done me the honour to ask me, and I have consented. I trust my presence will not be unpleasant to you, my child.'

For a moment Madeline did not reply. She disliked Madame de Fontenay, and yet she feared her. She knew that the widow had been instrumental in marrying

her to Monsieur Belleisle, and, not content with that, had kept with them, watching as the hawk watches the dove the poor victim whom she had caught, and frequently preventing, by her very presence, anything like a proper understanding between man and wife. And Madeline had a repulsion for the woman. She felt that she was the Frenchman's evil genius, ready to pander to his passions, and counteract any inclination he might have towards nobility and goodness. Still the pale widow's star was in the ascendant just then, and Madeline was powerless. She felt it would be unwise to make an open enemy of Madame; at any rate, until she had won over her accomplice. So she parried the question politely, and fixed her eyes on the case which Madame held in her hand.

'Diamonds, did you say, for me, Madame? I thought Monsieur Belleisle was poor?'

'So he was a week ago, but now he gives you these—put them on, my child—and hurry down, for Emile is waiting;' and without saying more she quitted the room.

Madeline opened the case which the widow had left behind her, and looked in surprise at the contents. Three diamond stones for the hair, a ruby band for the neck, and a fragile diamond bracelet for the arm.

She put them on, and throwing a thin lace scarf over her shoulders, ran downstairs.

She found Monsieur Belleisle waiting for her, clad also in becoming evening dress, and looking handsomer than she had ever seen him look before. He glanced at her approvingly from head to foot, kissed her, and led her to a carriage, which was waiting at the door, and which already held Madame de Fontenay. As soon as they were seated the horses moved off; whither, Madeline did not

know. A drive of a few minutes brought them to the door of a brilliantly-lighted building. The horses were pulled up; Monsieur Belleisle alighted, handed out Madame de Fontenay, then tenderly lifted Madeline in his arms and put her on the ground. He placed her hand upon his arm and led her forward—through a great lobby, and finally into a room where some two hundred people were seated at dinner.

The entrance of the three last guests attracted a good deal of attention. Madeline, still holding her husband's arm, and led by him down one side of the long room and up the other, began to blush and cast down her eyes in confusion, for she felt herself rapidly becoming the centre of observation.

At length places were found, and they commenced dinner. Again Madeline was confused and abashed, not by the public gaze this time, but by the assiduous attentions of her husband and Madame de

Fontenay. They treated her as if she were some Princess, who condescended when she smiled upon them and did them honour when she spoke. The girl was more troubled than ever, but she no longer tried to solve the strange problem. She received the homage of her husband with becoming gentleness, and ate her dinner as contentedly as she could under the circumstances.

Dinner over, Monsieur Belleisle rose, offered Madeline his arm, and, with much bustle and turmoil, conducted her from the room—the pallid widow following. Again she felt herself the centre of attraction, and, feeling less abashed, she held up her head with becoming grace and confidence, and swept her bright eyes along the ranks of flushed, admiring faces.

'My dear Madeline,' said Monsieur Belleisle to her that night, 'it is not always a rich wife who brings happiness to a man.

I married a treasure when I married *you, chérie.*'

To the widow he said, when the two were closeted alone—

'What say you to our plan now, Madame?'

'What I said before. The girl has beauty enough to send Paris mad, if she remains in the hands of a careful master.'

CHAPTER XIV.

DARKER DAYS.

THAT one exciting evening over, Madeline's life in the place became even more monotonous than it had been before. Every morning she was taken out, either by Monsieur Belleisle or Madame de Fontenay; but her walks were made in sequestered places, not amongst the gay throng of tourists who daily dipped themselves into the sea. Her evenings were spent quietly at home. But she was always met with the promise that the dulness of her present life was transitory, that there were brighter days in store.

That some mysterious work was going on, Madeline knew from the strange behaviour of her husband and the widow.

Sometimes he himself would disappear for several days together, leaving his wife in the care of Madame—then the lady would disappear, and for several days Madeline would be left alone with her husband; then, just as she was congratulating herself upon the relief, the widow would return—looking more benign than ever—and adding to Madeline's wonder by endless secret interviews with Belleisle.

Had the girl's mind been occupied with this pair alone she would certainly have thought their conduct more suspicious still, but she had other things to interest and trouble her. Since that night when, dressed in diamonds and lace, she had been taken to dine in public, she had written to her guardian three times, and had waited eagerly for the reply, which, she now began to fear, would never come. The only explanation she could give of the affair was that Mr. White, on hearing of her elopement, had gone over to the school

to look into the matter, and that the investigation and journey had kept him a long time from home, so that the letters written from time to time by his penitent ward were lying unopened in his studio in St. John's Wood. Madeline had arrived at this impotent conclusion, and was deriving some sad consolation from it, when her little spell of peace was brought to an end.

She was seated in the sitting-room one night, silently working at some embroidery; Belleisle reclining in an easy chair by the window, scanning the columns of 'Le Journal pour Rire,' when the postman arrived and letters were brought in —two for Belleisle and one for his wife. The Frenchman took his, read them, returned them to their envelopes, threw them carelessly on to a little table at his side, and again concentrated his attention on the more amusing contents of the paper, or rather he tried to do so, for by

this time it did not seem so easy for him to concentrate his thoughts at all. His eyes, which had hitherto travelled from line to line, now wandered from column to column—then his hands fell slightly, lowering the paper, and his eyes looked over the top at Madeline.

She had not moved from her seat; her work lay in her lap; and her hands, now trembling violently, held the open letter, upon which her eyes were fixed. Belleisle threw the paper aside, and walked towards her.

'Madeline, what is the matter?'

The girl turned her white face towards him, gave him the letter, then burst into a violent flood of tears. He took the letter, and read as follows:—

Madame Belleisle,—When you eloped from school with your beggarly French tutor you brought disgrace upon yourself and me. Remain with your husband—be true to him, if you can—as for me, I never wish either to see or hear of you again.

M. WHITE.

No sooner had Belleisle read the letter, than he tore it into fragments and threw them into the grate.

'The man is a villain and a coward,' he exclaimed; then, as Madeline rose to protest, he threw his arms around her and kissed her tear-stained cheek.

'Forgive me, *chérie*,' he said, 'the man may say what he likes of me, but I cannot bear that he shall insult my wife. Listen, Madeline,' he continued, drawing her down upon a seat beside him, 'I will correct your bad news with good news, though I did not intend to tell you so soon; well, my wife, after all you did not marry a poor man. I have had a good sum of money left to me and a fine house in Paris—and I am going to dress you in a fashion becoming to a rich man's wife, and take you to Paris for the season. You understand me?'

For the girl was looking at him as if

she comprehended nothing; and now she only said—

'Leave me a few minutes alone.'

He kissed her and led her to the door, as if his only wish in life was to bow to her will.

A few hours after, when husband and wife met again, Madeline seemed to be transformed into a different being. She walked straight up to her husband, put her hands into his, and said—

'When are we going to Paris, Monsieur?'

He smiled strangely.

'You are eager to be gone?'

'Yes, I could not bear to continue this quiet life *now*.'

'Madeline!'

'Yes.'

'You were not yourself this morning, so I did not tell you all my news. Are you composed enough to listen to me now?'

'Yes.'

'Well, then, there is a condition attached to the will which left me all the money—a condition to which, I fear, you will not be inclined to accede, *chérie.*'

Madeline raised her eyes to his.

'You have told me the news at a proper time then, Monsieur; I feel inclined to accede to anything to-day.'

'My wife,' said the Frenchman gravely, 'I would not ask you to accede to anything wrong. Well, the words in the will are these: "Five thousand pounds to my dear nephew, Emile Belleisle, if he is unwed. If he remain unwed for one year after my decease, the sum of three thousand pounds to be paid to him annually during his life. If he marries within the year the said three thousand pounds per annum to be paid to the State." Now when my beloved relative died I was a single man—when the news came to me I had been married two days. Perhaps it was ava-

ricious of me; but as I was so wretchedly poor I could not bear the thought of three thousand pounds per annum being taken from me and given to the State; so I thought, "I will say nothing of being married; I will take my Madeline to the sea-side, and live quietly with her until the year is expired, and then the money will be mine to pour at her feet."'

'And what has induced you to change your mind?'

'My beloved one, you shall hear. I made a confidante of my good aunt, Madame de Fontenay, and though she loves you not as I do, her woman's heart did you more justice. She said, "Why should the child suffer because you have come into a fortune? She has a good heart and generous impulses. Tell her—throw yourself upon her mercy—and let her enjoy your good fortune to the full."'

Again he paused; and again Madeline looked at him enquiringly. What did it

all mean? He was evidently afraid to speak on without some encouragement from her; and the encouragement was given.

Her curiosity being aroused, she argued within herself it could do her no possible harm just to hear what he had to propose.

'Well, M'sieur?' she cried, and Belleisle spoke on. His demand was simple in itself and easily acceded to. He would take his Madeline to Paris in a few days, he said; deck her in silks, satins, and jewels; give her a season of genuine Parisian life—if she would but consent to remove that frail band of gold from the third finger of her left hand; call her husband "Cousin," Madame de Fontenay "Maman," until the prescribed year had come to an end.

Madeline heard him without comment, and remained silent after he had ceased to speak. What could she do? Her conscience urged her not to accept. The

man had deceived her infamously already, and would not scruple to do so again; but then she remembered the letter which she had received that morning, and the voice within her was hushed. After all, she said to herself, what harm could come of it; she was secure against calumny, for she was in reality Madame Belleisle—so that should the worst come, and her relationship to the man be discovered, no one could possibly blame her. And if she refused, what was the alternative? To live alone by the sea during all the long, weary winter months, with such a past to reflect on—and not a soul either to share her sorrows or her moments of calmness and peace. The prospect was so dismal that the girl shuddered, and, looking into her husband's face, said hurriedly, as if she had strange misgivings of herself—

'I consent, Monsieur, I consent—only let us get away from this place, and

perhaps the excitement of the journey will take away this load from my heart.'

Just a week from that day three travellers were journeying towards the gay French capital; their names were—The Vicomte de Belleisle, for the Frenchman professed to inherit a title with his fortune; Madame and Mademoiselle de Fontenay.

CHAPTER XV.

BELLEISLE SPREADS HIS NET.

'MADELINE—I wish you to do me a favour?'

'And that is, Monsieur——?'

'To wear to-night the satin dress and the pearl ornaments which I gave to you three weeks ago.'

Belleisle was standing before his wife, buttoning the kid gloves which reached almost to her elbow; for she was ready to take her usual morning drive with Madame de Fontenay. The girl allowed him to finish his task, then she spoke.

'Why is it you wish me to wear that dress, Monsieur?'

'Because, *chérie*, we shall have a new guest.'

'Indeed?'

'A young French nobleman—whom, if we wish to stand well in society, it is our interest to fascinate.'

'To fascinate!'

The ejaculation made Belleisle look sharply into his wife's face. He was by no means pleased by what he saw there. He opened his lips to speak, but was prevented by the entrance of Madame de Fontenay.

The widow, dressed as usual in rich widow's mourning, came quickly into the room, and took Madeline's gloved hand in hers.

'A thousand apologies for having kept you waiting,' she said. 'Come, my child—Emile, be good enough to see us to the carriage, which has already waited some minutes at the door.'

Belleisle, obedient to the command,

conducted the ladies down the oak staircase of the hotel, handed them into the carriage which waited to receive them, and stood bare-headed at the door to see it roll away. He smiled, waved his hand and kissed the tips of his fingers—but Madeline, to whom these blandishments were cast, had already sunk back into the carriage, and relapsed into a gloomy dream.

She had a good deal to think about—much to try and explain to herself—and she had chosen this time as the best for what she had to do.

They had been located in Paris for three months now, and during that time she had led a life which puzzled even herself. Gentle and confiding, guided wholly by her husband and his accomplice, she had carried out their wishes in every respect. She had dressed herself in the fine dresses which were brought to her—driven about in a carriage by the side of

her *soi-disant* mother, and behaved as she had been taught to the guests whom she met at her husband's table.

It was the behaviour of these guests which troubled her and first set her speculating as to the kind of life into which she had unwittingly been led. She was not astonished that they should court her favours, for when she announced herself single she laid herself open to the admiration of single men—what astonished her was that after these gentlemen had ceased to grace with their presence the hospitable board of the Vicomte de Belleisle, they would acknowledge with a stony stare the graceful salute of the widow if she happened to meet them during any of her daily drives about the city.

It was curious, Madeline thought, and on the impulse of the moment she mentioned the fact to her husband and Madame. They looked significantly towards each other, gave some slight ex-

planation, and turned the conversation to other things.

But Madeline was not satisfied; she had noted the look which had passed between the pair, and it made her more curious than she had been before. What could it mean? There was some dark mystery about their life which she must discover, ere it led her into serious harm.

But how to discover it? After long pondering she resolved to pick out from the innumerable guests who frequented her husband's table some man to whom she could speak freely, and to question him.

The resolve made, she endeavoured to carry it out. Every night when, attired in clinging satin or velvet, she entered the luxurious dining-room by Madame de Fontenay's side, her eye travelled from one place to another, timidly looking for sympathy which never came. Although the guests would flatter and flirt with her,

there was not one among them whom she felt she could really trust.

So the days and weeks wore on, hopelessly, sadly, despite the glitter and gaudy show. Hope died within her heart; but suddenly it was revived.

'Madeline, dearest, you did not tell me this morning whether or not you would do me the favour I asked of you?' said Belleisle again that day after her drive was over.

Madeline looked at him quietly.

'You wish me to look well to-night?'

'My charming little one, you do always look well,' retorted the polite Frenchman. 'I wish you to look second to no lady in Paris.'

'Very well, Monsieur. I will try.'

A new guest to dress for; some new flatteries to listen to. The announcement was not novel, and yet Madeline felt that night as she had never felt before. She had a pleasure in dressing, a delight in

watching herself grow more beautiful under the busy hands of her maid, and when at length her toilet was complete, she sat with beating heart and heightened colour, as if awaiting the consummation of some great event.

She entered the dining-room, as she had done hundreds of times before, by Madame de Fontenay's side. She bowed, and shook hands with all she knew, and then was introduced to the stranger.

'Monsieur le Marquis de Vaux—Mademoiselle de Fontenay.'

Madeline inclined her head for a moment, then raising her eyes she saw that she was receiving a low bow and a deep blush from the stranger.

A tall fair young fellow, of some two or three and twenty, looking more like an English lad than a French Marquis. Perhaps it was this English look which touched Madeline's heart and made her feel that glow of sympathy which she had

waited for so long and thought would never come.

How the dinner passed off that night Madeline never knew. She sat as one in a dream, eating little, listening to the busy hum of conversation about her, and ever conscious that a pair of feeble blue eyes were fixed upon her face.

Dinner over, Madame de Fontenay rose, and Madeline, taking the hint, followed her from the room. She did not see any of the gentlemen again that night, and the widow did not leave her until it was time to retire to rest.

Several days passed. Every day she met the Marquis at dinner, and each time she met him his manner seemed to change. Whenever he shook hands he gave her fingers a slight pressure; sometimes his eyes, after diligently trying to meet hers, would fix upon her face a look full of strange inquiry, which she, not comprehending, could not reply to. Ere long

his easy freshness wore off—his manner grew nervous and changeful, his cheeks pale and haggard; he seemed to become the slave of Belleisle, and at times glanced with almost terror-stricken eyes at Madeline.

What could it all mean? Every day Madeline grew more troubled, more sick at heart.

She had resolved to elicit an explanation from the nobleman, but she soon found that to be impossible. Now that she watched for an opportunity she saw that she had none. Although apparently a free agent, she was, in reality, a prisoner —guarded and carefully watched either by her husband or Madame de Fontenay. What was to be done? Speak to him she must and would; stratagem must be employed—but how?

After long pondering and much thought, Madeline hit upon a plan which she thought might possibly succeed.

Having got dressed for dinner one night, she dismissed her maid, and, before the widow could come for her, hurriedly wrote down the following lines :—

Monsieur,—I would like to see you and speak with you alone. Please meet me to-morrow night at nine o'clock in the lobby of the Hôtel Bellevue.

MADELINE DE FONTENAY.

That evening when dinner was over and Madeline rose to follow Madame de Fontenay from the room, she deliberately shook hands with the Marquis.

'Good-night, Monsieur,' she said softly; then her hand was timidly withdrawn, and the Marquis, with a bow, let his arm drop by his side.

Madeline retired early that night; the next morning she went her usual drive with her companion.

The air was bitterly cold, for winter had set in, and Madeline, wrapped in furs, lay back in the carriage with flushed cheeks and feverishly sparkling eyes, and inhaled

the chilly air with quick and feverish sighs.

'God only knows,' she was thinking, 'what trouble this evening may bring; a few hours hence and I shall meet the Marquis, and having met him, what can I say or do? I will throw myself upon his mercy—I will tell him the truth, and, in return, demand it of him.'

To her amazement the Marquis did not appear at dinner that night. She saw that Monsieur Belleisle was worried by his absence, and that Madame de Fontenay, too, seemed strangely ill at ease. Dinner was hurried over quickly, and the ladies retired. Having reached the drawing-room, Madeline threw herself into an easy chair and closed her eyes.

'I have a headache,' she said, in answer to Madame de Fontenay's anxious inquiries. 'I am feverish to-night, Madame, and I think I shall soon retire.' And the widow, secretly glad of the

opportunity of being alone that evening, kissed the girl on both her cheeks, and soon withdrew.

Madeline was feverish. Now that the time was passing so quickly, the thought of her coming interview weighed upon her; but, having made the appointment, she was bound to keep it, or gravely compromise herself.

She drew aside her window curtain and looked out. It was a fair still night, but growing every hour still colder. She rang for her maid, and with her assistance took off her dinner dress, and clad herself in one of the plainest costumes she possessed. When she was dressed, ready to depart, she said—

'Remember, Augustine, my going out to-night is a secret both from my mother and Monsieur Belleisle. If they ask for me, say that I am still unwell, and have retired early to rest.'

Before the girl, who was doubtless in

Belleisle's confidence, could reply or interfere, Madeline had hurried from the room, and was in the open street.

The place of meeting was only a few minutes' distant from the hotel where she was dwelling; she reached it just as the clock struck nine. As she entered the door she saw a gentleman standing with his back towards her—the only other living being in the great vestibule.

Madeline approached him, questioningly.

'Monsieur?'

He turned with an exclamation—she recoiled. The eyes looking so steadily into hers belonged to a face which she remembered well. She was face to face with the young Englishman whom she had met on the night of her elopement from school.

CHAPTER XVI.

'WHICH DO YOU PITY?'

DISMAYED at the unexpected encounter, Madeline gazed at the Englishman for a time in speechless confusion; then she turned her head and gazed helplessly around.

'Mademoiselle,' said the young man, quietly, 'I fear you are not prepared for this meeting with me. Well, let me tell you I am here on an errand of duty, not pleasure. My friend, the Marquis de Vaux, has placed this affair entirely in my hands——'

'Oh, Monsieur!'

'Pray do not interrupt me, Mademoiselle. I have little to say, so our interview can be brief—it will be better for us both. I had the pleasure of meeting you once

before—only once—when I offered you my assistance, because I feared you needed some one to pluck you from the clutches of that Frenchman, in whose company you were staying at the hotel. But when I offered you my help I thought you were some pure-minded, misguided English girl. I did not know that you were the mistress of a scoundrel, and that you were making your way to Paris to become the decoy for a gambling hell.'

'Monsieur! monsieur!'

'Pray, hear me out. 'Tis some weeks now since I discovered whither my seemingly virtuous English girl had flown. I have seen you driving in the crowded thoroughfares of Paris, smiling and bowing to the miserable wretches whom your smiles have brought to ruin. I saw you, and said nothing. Had you been discreet, I should have spared you. But since you seem to have no discretion, since you have thought it pastime to delude and cause the

ruin of a friend of mine, I give you due notice I shall spare you no more. Here are the letters which from time to time you have written to my friend, and which your trusty servant has delivered for you. I give you two days to leave Paris with your protector; if, at the end of that time, you still linger here, I shall speak to the police, and let the law take its course.'

Without another word he walked away.

Madeline did not move; she stood like one turned to stone. In her hand she held a packet of letters, while the words 'decoy of a gambling hell' rang with strange echoes in her brain. How long she stood there she did not know; the sharp breath of the night air brushing her cheek, as she tottered from the hotel, recalled her to herself. She shiveringly drew her cloak around her and walked—home.

The smart French maid was amazed to see her mistress back so early.

With a wave of the hand Madeline stopped all questioning and dismissed the girl for the night. Then she sat down to think. How her head ached! How cold and shivering and wretched she felt! Days and nights seemed to have gone by since she started off on her strange errand that evening. In reality only a few hours had passed. How those few hours had changed her!

Presently she remembered the packet which the Englishman had given her. She took it from her pocket, burst the band which held it, and the letters were scattered on her dressing-table. She took up one, opened it, and read, in what appeared to be her own handwriting—

Be not so hasty, my dear friend. I must break the news gently to my beloved mother, who cannot bear the thought of parting with me. Our behaviour in public must not alter, but be sure I adore you. A thousand greetings from MADELINE.

Again—

Be cautious in your behaviour, and above all try

to please the Vicomte, my cousin. Do anything he wishes you—it will come all right in the end. He has a stupid love of play—indulge him ; if he wins from you he shall be made afterwards to restore.

Madeline read the letters over and over again. She picked up several others and found them all to be in the same tone —protestations of love for the Marquis and prayers to him not to offend Monsieur Belleisle, of whom, she avowed, she stood in the greatest fear—and the forgeries were so good as almost to deceive herself.

The past was all clear to her now—she knew what she had done and what she was; she recognised the true worth of the man she had married, and of the woman who called herself her friend.

What should she do? whither should she go? For the first time in her life she could understand the feeling which prompted wretched outcast women to stand upon the parapet of a bridge and

cast their miserable bodies into the depths of the blackened river; at least their woes would be ended—their weary bodies be at rest. She felt that such a death would be acceptable to her that night. Oh, if she could only leap into the darkness, and end it all!

She gathered up the letters, which still lay upon her table, threw off her bonnet which lay like a weight upon her head, and opened her door. It was still early enough for Belleisle to be up. She would see him, speak to him; she could not wait another hour, with that newly acquired knowledge on her mind.

With this idea she left her chamber, looked first into one room, then another—and was about to return to her own in despair, when she was arrested by the sound of voices, which she recognised as those of her husband and Madame de Fontenay. She paused and listened. The pair were closeted in Madame de Fonte-

nay's private room, and their conversation was of an exciting nature.

Madeline soon heard her own name.

'Emile, you are a fool,' says Madame de Fontenay; 'why he stays away I know not. I only know that one little note from Madeline will bring him back again.'

'And if he comes?'

'If he comes, *mon ami*, you can win from him a few more hundreds, and then make a quarrel, refuse to give him the little one's hand, and rid yourself of him for ever.'

For a time they were silent, or spoke in undertones. Madeline was about to open the door and break up their converse, when the widow raised her voice and spoke again.

'You are a fool,' she said hotly, 'and although I advise you well, you, by your bungling, upset all my plans. Did I not advise you to provide for the future by entering a good school, and marrying,

either by fair means or foul, the richest girl that the rich school contained? Yes. But you, like a fool, ran off with the poorest, and did your very best to ensure your own ruin.'

'I did not know that the girl was poor.'

'Did not know! it was your duty, my friend, to ascertain that she was rich. Well, we need not complain now. Thanks to me again, the silly girl has been useful to you, and will be so again. Listen, then——'

But Madeline, trembling outside, could bear it no longer; she turned the handle of the door, and entered the room.

She still wore her walking dress; her face was white as death, her hands trembling and cold; while her fingers closed nervously around the packet of letters which she held.

Madame de Fontenay, who believed that her dupe was quietly sleeping, gave

a little scream; Belleisle started to his feet.

'Madeline, *diable!* what brings you here?' he exclaimed, thrown off his guard.

For a moment Madeline did not answer him. She stood apparently calm and collected, but with a face whiter than that of the dead, fixing her large blue eyes upon first one and then another of the faces before her.

'You are a villain!' she said at length, walking steadily up to Monsieur Belleisle; 'you have tried by cruel, cold-blooded falsehood to compass my ruin; you have nearly succeeded, but, thank God, I have found you out at last.'

'Livid with rage, and completely taken off his guard, Belleisle stood with clenched fists, as if ready to strike his victim.

Madame de Fontenay stepped forward to restrain him, but Madeline stood her ground.

'Do not think to frighten me,' she said; 'those days are past, Monsieur Belleisle; though you were fifty times my husband, you shall be punished for all that you have done to me.'

'Madeline, my love, be reasonable,' said Madame de Fontenay, 'you are under some misapprehension—let me explain!'

'Let *you* explain, Madame! you did that admirably to Monsieur Belleisle before I entered the room. I know that you are the cause of all this evil; I know it is through your wicked prompting that Monsieur Belleisle has been induced to make me what I am; I know that you have plotted together to bring about the ruin of a poor girl who never did you harm. With regard to you I am powerless, but upon that man, if there is any justice in the world, I will be revenged.'

By this time Belleisle had partly recovered his composure. He walked up to the angry girl, and asked quietly—

'How will you be revenged? tell me that!'

'I will prosecute you for forgery; you wrote these letters to the Marquis de Vaux; you forged Mr. White's writing, and sent a letter to me; he shall prosecute you too.'

Monsieur Belleisle turned whiter still.

'It would be a new sensation in court,' he said; 'a young English girl prosecuting her French paramour. It would give you notoriety doubtless, Mademoiselle.'

'What do you mean?——'

'What I say—you are not my wife, thank God. I was by no means such a fool as you think, Mademoiselle. I went through a mock ceremony with you—

thinking I would have a real one if I found your fortune was worth the sacrifice. I found it was not; therefore I have pleasure in informing you that you are free.—After all, there is not very much harm done, Mademoiselle, and it may give you pleasure to know that by gracing my table with your presence, and smiling upon my guests, you have been the means of bringing some money to me. No one but my good aunt knows that you have been my mistress—and with her I am sure your secret is safe.'

Still Madeline was silent; so, after a pause, Belleisle continued.

'Now that I have explained you will perceive, I am sure, the necessity for silence. If you dare to make a scene I shall tell the whole story, and I will bring dozens of witnesses to prove that you played very willingly into my hands. If you are silent, I too will be silent. You

can go to England, marry an English man, and become a model English wife——'

The Frenchman paused, for Madeline, uttering a low moan, at last sank swooning upon the floor.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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